

TAMBIEN BAILAMOS EN EL NORTE:
SONIDERO, TRANSNATIONAL LIVES, AND MEXICAN MIGRANTS IN THE
MIDWEST

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to:

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Abstract

The United State of America holds a legacy of xenophobic attitudes towards Mexican immigrants dating back to the massive repatriations of the 1930s. In response to anti-immigrant actions, Mexican immigrants have often turned to popular culture to document racial violence and labor exploitation. Currently, popular music serves as a means for Mexican immigrants to proclaim a cultural presence in the United States. *Tambien Bailamos en el Norte* is an interdisciplinary study incorporating ethnography and lyric analysis to examine the intersections between Mexican immigration to the Chicagoland area and the popular social dances known as *sonidero*. Sonidero dances consist of a Mexican *Sonido* (DJesque performer) with enormous sound systems playing popular *música tropical* such as cumbia and salsa for large crowds. Sonidero was born in the urban Mexico City barrios during the late nineteen-fifties when Mexican *sonidos* used humble sound systems and Colombian cumbia records to host street *bailes* (dances). The pioneer sonidos of Mexico City provided Latin American rhythms to working-class residents originally restricted to elite Mexican socialites. The *Sonido* eventually incorporated *saludos* (shout-outs) delivered concurrently with the music. Sonidero's popularity expanded to the Mexican immigrant communities of the Chicagoland area and the rest of the U.S., due to accelerated waves of immigration during the 1990s and 2000s. This dissertation argues that sonidero and its enthusiasts engage in a unique *Mexicanidad* fusing Mexican nationalism with adopted Latin American popular music to create transnational lives in the Chicagoland area. Chicagoland sonidero enthusiasts challenge how scholars study popular music in U.S. Mexican immigrant communities because the *Mexicanidad* invoked in sonidero, conflicts with the long-standing *musica norteña* traditions of rural northern Mexico. I use this unique expression of *Mexicanidad* found in sonidero spaces and in the lives of my research subjects to theorize new ways of studying community formation, transnationalism, cultural citizenship, political economy, and mass communications among recently-arrived Mexican immigrants. In doing so, the participants of my dissertation demonstrate how Mexican immigrants cross cultural borders as well as geographical ones by forging transnational lives, linking Mexico City with the Chicagoland area.

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INTRODUCTION

“No es suficiente reconocer que hay varios Méxicos dentro de México, varios niveles de realidad mexicana. Hace falta reconocer que una buena parte de México salió de México y vive en Estados Unidos...”¹ - Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta

On a Saturday afternoon, my Mexican grandmother describes a previous family party that took place at my aunt’s home in the heart of Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood. My grandmother narrates the musical moments of the party by describing how my family sang Mexican corridos performed by Ramon Ayala, and Carlos y Jose in karaoke form. Following the *corridos* that night, a family friend sung the famous *Sabor a Mi* bolero (ballad) popularized by el Trio Los Panchos. My grandmother burst into laughter after explaining the event and simultaneously said, “Quitame ese trio y ponme un *corrido*.” [Stop singing that romantic ballad and instead sing a corrido]. My grandmother, again, told my uncle on a separate occasion when listening to a *cumbia* on the radio, “Oyes lo que bailan los *chilangos*,” [Listen to what the *chilangos* dance].² In the same city, Mexican migrants filled a nightclub to capacity to enjoy a performance by one of Mexico City’s renowned sonido, Sonido Amistad Caracas. Individuals that night danced to cumbia and salsa not traditional Mexican *rancheras* or *narcocorridos*. They wore graphic button shirts and white dancing shoes instead of cowboy boots and hats. Amistad Caracas proclaimed over a cumbia song, during a Chicago performance, “ahí está la banda de Puebla,”³

¹ Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta, “*Chicago lindo y querido si muero lejos de ti: el pasito duranguense, la onda grupera y las nuevas geografías de la identidad popular mexicana*” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 26 (2010): 45.

² Chilangos or Chilango holds several contested meanings. The more popular meaning is someone a Mexican originally from Mexico City.

³ Poblanos are Mexicans originating from the Mexican state of Puebla. Puebla is southeast of Mexico City in the Mixteca Sur region comprising of a major indigenous populace in the states of Oaxaca, Puebla, and Guerrero.

These vignettes highlight how Mexican immigrants in the Midwestern United States compete for strategic positions, among each other, by identifying with unique forms of Mexican popular music. U.S. racial hierarchies, however, have erased Mexican cultural diversity and reduced Mexican immigrants to stereotypical constructions including vaqueros or charros sipping tequila and listening to mariachi music. Economic restructuring throughout Mexico and the United States has accelerated the migration of Mexicans from all over the republic to migrate north. In retrospect, Mexico houses numerous heterogeneous cultures and languages. Mexican origin is the basis for unity among Mexican immigrants in the U.S. when faced with nativist backlashes but individual immigrants hold unique cultural identities. The U.S. becomes the place where Mexicans, from all over Mexico, share space and struggle to express their unique identities. These various Mexican cultural identities, however, meet in Mexican neighborhoods found in the Midwestern United States, not Mexico. For example, Mexico City immigrants share communities with Sinaloenses across the United States. The tensions deriving from these meetings become the focus of this dissertation.

My project examines the popular expressive culture known as sonidero originally from Mexico City. I propose that sonidero holds an important place for Mexicans in the Midwest because it helps Mexicans make meaning of their lives outside of their national homeland. Sonidero dance spaces are spaces of leisure and consumption-oriented, but I suggest that sonidero dance spaces tell us just as much about how Mexicans in the United States forge community as do discussions of labor and housing. My project draws on Chicano Cultural Studies, labor studies, political economy, transnational migration studies, and media studies. I also heavily rely on theories advanced by U.S. Latino

Studies such as cultural citizenship. Latino Studies, according to Pedro Caban, is “a multidisciplinary academic field that explores the diversity of localized and transnational experiences of Latin American and Caribbean national origin populations in the United States”.⁴ Informed by Pedro Caban’s definition of Latino Studies, I flesh out the hybridity taking place in sonidero that merges Mexican cultural codes with Latin American musical identities. My goal is to address how Mexican migrants position themselves in the Midwest as subjects in dance spaces.

Sonidero holds a multifaceted identity. Cathy Ragland (2003) highlights in her study that the “sonidero” is a Mexican deejay with enormous sound systems playing popular cumbias delivering nostalgic shout outs. Her study of sonidero danced by Mexicans in New York advances that the sonideros, which she uses interchangeably with Mexican deejays, construct transnational social spaces through this expressive culture. Ragland calls the deejays, “sonideros.” Sonidero bailes held in U.S. cities construct social spaces where Mexican migrants recreate the type of dances popularized in Mexico City. Colombian cumbia takes center stage in Ragland’s analysis of sonidero. Yet, I ask what happens when you center non-Mexican music to express a Mexican consciousness? How is this cultural style related to Mexican migration and labor? How do Mexican sonidero enthusiasts challenge inequality and cultural citizenship? Lastly, how does sonidero negotiate its presence on mass communication mediums like the internet?

Tambien Bailamos en el Norte is a study of transgressing musical boundaries and national identities. George Lipsitz claims, “Through music we learn about place and

⁴ Pedro A. Caban. “Moving From the Margins to Where? Three Decades of Latino/a Studies,” *Latino Studies* 1 (2003): 6.

displacement”.⁵ Mexicans migrate to the Midwest for various reasons such as sexual freedom, family reunification, travel, but mostly for work.⁶ The transnational migrations of Mexican bodies to the Midwest are accompanied with their music cultures. Music and dance are the cultural items people use to express their belonging to a collective identity. It is through music and dance, I suggest, that we can also study how migrants articulate their unique subjectivities. José Muñoz Celeste and Fraser Delgado argue, "Dancing sets Politics in motion, bringing people together in rhythmic affinity where identification takes the form of histories written on the bodies through gesture."⁷ It is in the Midwest, where my study intends to understand how Mexican musical identities are contested and celebrated. Mexican immigration to the Midwest is constantly rewriting its own history. Dancing and musical styles are ways to identify quotidian understandings of regional Mexicanidades expressed by the heterogeneous Midwestern Mexican community.

Mexican immigrants from Mexico City, the state of Puebla, and the surrounding southern region of Mexico make up the majority of sonidero enthusiasts in the Midwest. Sonidos were responsible for introducing cumbia and Latin American rhythms to Mexico City and surrounding areas. Mexican musicians throughout Mexico and the U.S. constantly engaged with Latin American rhythms. However, many regions were invested in reinterpreting these sounds. For example, cumbia experience a musical makeover in Northern Mexico with artists like Fito Olivares and Rigo Tovar. Sonidos in Mexico City

⁵ George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Focus of Place*. (London: Verso, 1994), 2.

⁶Valdes, Dennis N., "The New Northern Borderlands: An Overview of Midwestern Chicano History" in *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies, vol.2: Mexicans in Midwest*, ed. by Juan Garcia, (Tucson: Mexican American Studies and Research Center, University of Arizona, 1989), 20.

⁷ Celeste Fraser Delgado & José Esteban Muñoz, "Rebellions of Everynight Life" in Delgado, Celeste Fraser and José Esteban Muñoz. *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 9.

were invested playing original Colombian cumbia records in the early days of sonidero not reinterpreting it. The appreciation Mexico City residents had for cumbia continued when these individuals took to migrating northward. Their desire to consume the latest cumbias set the stage for these immigrants to continue their investment in sonidero after establishing residency in the United States. Ana Lopez notes that, “Latin American nations have foundational rhythms which are fought over—and crossed—with as much regularity as their real cartographical borders.”⁸ Salsa and cumbia become points of contestations among cultural critics because they are not native forms to Mexico. This reality makes sonidero an interesting medium of analysis of Mexican identity in and outside of Mexico. Sonidero then becomes an expressive culture allowing Mexicans to rearticulate Mexican popular culture, regardless of its point of origin.

American (Immigration) Studies in the 21st Century

In the 1950s, American Studies debated immigration policy and whether immigration was beneficial to America. In *Immigration: An American Dilemma*, Henry Pratt Fairchild claimed the “new” immigrants differed from the “old” immigrants. He furthered his claim that the new immigrants formed cohesive national [ethnic] groups inside the U.S. that delayed their assimilation to American culture.⁹ John Carlos Rowe reminds us that traditional American studies subscribed to assimilation of immigrant groups to a dominant [American] culture.¹⁰ Twentieth-century American immigration studies argued for the assimilation of immigrant groups into the larger society. Robert E.

⁸ Ana M. Lopez “Of Rhythms and Borders” in Celeste Fraser and José Esteban Muñoz. *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 310-311.

⁹ Henry Pratt Fairchild, “Melting Pot Mistake” in *Immigration: An American Dilemma*, ed. Benjamin M. Ziegler (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1953), 20.

¹⁰ John Carlos Rowe, “Post-Nationalism, Globalism, and the New American Studies” in *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California, 2000), 23-24.

Park, the prominent Chicago School sociologist, theorized social groups, also applicable to immigrants, went through a four-step process of contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation.¹¹ Milton Gordon, too, theorized a step-by-step process for the “structural assimilation” of immigrants to “Anglo conformity” which he argued to be the prevalent ideology of this country.¹² These scholars were arguing for the absorption of immigrants into America’s social, cultural, and political institutions in order to reduce alienation. Oscar Handlin, one of America’s prominent immigration historians dedicated his entire scholarly career investigating America’s immigrants. Handlin argued that European immigrants assimilated to American society.¹³ Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou built on older migration literature to theorize, “segmented assimilation.” Segmented assimilation is a multi-directional process where children of immigrants either fully integrate into white, middle-class, continue in the underclass, or excel in the labor market while maintaining their cultural roots.¹⁴ These scholars concerned themselves with how successful immigrants are incorporated into America’s cultural fabric according to race and ethnicity. The assimilation school of immigration failed to acknowledge how race, class, and gender, with the exception of Portes and Zhou, influenced immigrants’ experiences in the United States.

A second school approach to American immigration studies was world systems theory, epitomized by “push/pull.” Push/Pull theories of migration focused on the effects

¹¹ Robert E. Park, “Our Racial Frontiers on the Pacific” in *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1950), 150.

¹² Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 71, 115.

¹³ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People*. (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1951), 200.

¹⁴ Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, “The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants” *Annals, AAPSS* 530 (1993), 82.

the international economy has on human mobility.¹⁵ The Push/Pull school systematically demonstrated the forces in the natal country that “pushed” their citizens outward along with the simultaneous “pull” forces that influenced migrants towards the receiving countries.¹⁶ Immanuel Wallerstein called for a different approach to study international migration with his version of the push/pull model, “world system economy,” which he defined as “a network of integrated production processes united in a single division of labor...Its political superstructure is the interstate system composed of ‘states’ ...integrated in a larger division of labor.”¹⁷ Saskia Sassen expands on Wallerstein’s world systems theory in her discussion of the internationalization of the labor force by focusing on center/periphery models. She argues that labor imports perpetuate “the center’s dominance over the periphery”.¹⁸ Massey et al. built on this approach to argue that international migration is a response to the core’s penetration into the periphery with capitalist markets. Penetration is followed with a displacement of the periphery’s labor force and their livelihoods directing them to the core looking for sustainable wages.¹⁹

Assimilation and world systems theories assumed their analysis painted a holistic picture of the immigrant experience. These scholars, however, failed to include individual voices that spoke to issues of class, race, and especially gender. Critical interventions

¹⁵ For one of the earliest works to begin theorizing Push, Pull theory, see E.G. Ravenstein, "The Laws of Migration." *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 48 (1885): 167–235.

¹⁶ For a fuller description of Push-Pull model, see Everett Lee, “A Theory of Migration,” *Demography* 3 (1966): 47-57.

¹⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Politics of the World Economy: The States, the Movements, and the Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 80.

¹⁸ Saskia Sassen-Koob, “The Internalization of the Labor Force” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 15(1980): 19.

¹⁹ Douglas S. Massey et al., *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 277.

have been made by interdisciplinary intellectuals to center gender in migration studies. Patricia Pessar argues that significant topics such as family organization and challenges to patriarchy emerged “when gender is brought to the foreground in migration studies.”²⁰ Donna Gabaccia reminds us that migration became an important factor for women “from the other side” to obtain a secure future in a changing economy.²¹ Scholars centering gender in their analysis of migration argued that woman does not automatically equate to gender. Martin Manalansan’s phenomenal study of gay and transgender Filipino negotiating transnational lives in New York City highlights how intersections of race, space, and homosexuality can be theorized using gender as a theoretical category.²² Gender scholars had confronted migration studies to make a critical intervention, which de-centered the myth that migration was simply a male experience. More importantly, gendered migration studies have demonstrated women and non-heteronormative individuals engaged with the global economy by laboring in the U.S., while assisting with financial support to families in the natal countries.

Transnationalism like gender shifted how scholars examine human mobility, the flow of capital, ideas, and material goods. According to Glick Schiller et al., transnationalism is defined “as the processes by which migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”²³ Their objective was to demonstrate the complex relationships immigrants had with many physical and social locations. The transnational turn also encouraged scholars to examine

²⁰ Patricia Pessar, “Engendering Migration Studies: The Case of New Immigrants in America. *American Behavioral Scientist* 42 (1999): 577.

²¹ Donna Gabaccia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 12.

²² Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press 2003).

²³ Ibid, 7.

other modes of interconnectedness that not always involved physical migration. The transnational turn in migration studies produced a profound shift in how scholars examined human mobility, the flow of capital, ideas, and material goods. Scholars of transnationalism questioned how immigrants were going to recreate the state by influencing politics and development of infrastructure in their natal country.²⁴

In our current state of American (immigration) studies, post-nationalist American Studies scholars critique nationalism rather than advocate for assimilation like their 1950s counterparts. The critique of American nationalism by postnationalist American Studies pinpoints how immigrants challenge racial, gender, sexual, and citizenship inequalities. While anti-immigrant activist Patrick Buchanan argues for the mass deportation of Latinos because these immigrants are altering America's culture, Amy Kaplan offers a different outlook on Latino immigrants and America, "The borderlands linked the study of ethnicity and immigration inextricably to the study of international relations and empire."²⁵ Kaplan's critique of American exceptionalism simultaneously demonstrates how Mexican and Latino immigrants confront empire in their everyday lives. Immigration has left millions of Mexicans on the margins of American society. Mexican immigrants have resisted such marginality by protesting for better labor conditions, and immigrant rights. Mexican immigrants also resist American empire by retaining the traditions and customs they practiced in Mexico. Thus, culture also becomes

²⁴ See the opening vignettes in Linda Bash, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. (Australia: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1994).

²⁵ Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan & Donald Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 17.

a battleground because it too transgresses physical and social borders like the 2,000 mile boundary line that separates Mexico from the U.S.

If postnationalist American Studies critiques nationalism and empire, the field must continue to acknowledge the diversity of the United States resulting from immigration. Curtis Marez recently argued, “that migration is not a marginal, episodic, or temporary feature of life in the United States, but rather a central and permanent part of it—and hence a topic of ongoing interest for scholars in and around American Studies.”²⁶ By doing so, American Studies scholars can center the lives of immigrant and their migration histories triggered by international labor markets.

“En el extranjero...”: Mexican Popular Music and the Politics of Transnational Space

Legendary ranchero singer Vicente Fernández expressed, “en el extranjero, es cuando yo quiero más a mi nación,” [It is on foreign soil, when I love my country most] in his rendition of “Como Mexico, no hay dos” (Like Mexico, there can never be two of the same). Fernández elaborates in that same song how California is a beautiful place but he’d rather have himself a shot of tequila in Mexico. Fernández travels extensively across the globe but mostly to the United States to sing his famous rancheras. He performs to sold-out audiences all over the United States. The reason behind his mega-U.S. tours is to sing to the large Mexican immigrant population residing all over the country. Perhaps he loves his country more in the *extranjero* because he performs for his compatriots working and living in foreign land. We can begin to imagine a love for Mexico outside of Mexico through music. Vicente Fernández’s use of *extranjero* locates his northern neighbor as

²⁶ Curtis Marez, “Preface to the Nation and Migration: Past and Future” *American Quarterly* 60 (2008): vii.

part of the Mexican diaspora²⁷ because the large displaced Mexican immigrant communities residing in the U.S. profess their love for Mexico in a foreign land with his rancheras. Sonidero, which differs from Vicente Fernández's ranchera, also speaks to nationalism in the *extranjero*. Similar to Vicente Fernández, sonidero in the United States creates a love for Mexico by Mexicans living transnational lives..²⁸ Sonidero as a social dance space contributes to the burgeoning field of Latino music styles and dances that construct transnational narratives. My goal is fill a gap in the literature on popular music and dance by revealing that sonidero articulates Mexican immigrant experiences differently than previous studies of Mexican music and dance cultures.

Scholars of migration studies and anthropology spearheaded a rich debate about transnationalism to understand mobility across borders (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc 1994; Guarnizo & Smith 2004). The mobility of Mexicans to the United has been discussed by scholars studying transnationalism (Rouse 1991, 1996; Smith 2006). Scholars of transnationalism focus more than just bodily movement across nation-states boundaries. Guarnizo and Smith note "that transnational flows...also include multiple exchanges of monetary and non-monetary resources, material and symbolic objects, commodities and cultural values."²⁹ Arjun Appadurai broadens our way of thinking through transnational processes through the use of *ethnoscapes*. *Ethnoscapes* are landscapes with multi-stranded webs of connections spanning across the globe where the moving bodies as

²⁷ I want to borrow James Clifford's working ideas of Diaspora as transnational networks which include accommodation and resistance to the natal country while involve maintaining communities and homes away from home. See James Clifford, "Diasporas" *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (1994):307-308.

²⁸ Cathy Ragland discussed the symbolic construction of the shout out in sonidero dances, see Cathy Ragland, "Mediating Between Two Worlds: The Sonideros of Mexican Youth Dances," *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore* 26 (2000): 8-17.

²⁹ Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith, "The Locations of Transnationalism," in *Transnationalism from Below* ed. Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 19.

individuals and collective groups affect the politics of the nations.³⁰ Transnationalism as a framework and process situate this dissertation within the larger body of works focusing on Mexican musical and dance practices in the U.S.

The use of Mexican music to inform us about the Mexican immigrant communities of the United States dates back to earlier pioneer scholars. Manuel Gamio, in his classic study *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, dedicates an entire chapter to popular corridos. According to Gamio, corridos are used “to express his [the Mexican immigrant] experience in the new country”.³¹ Groundbreaking scholar Americo Paredes worked through the study of corridos on the Texas-Mexico border region by coining the concept “Greater Mexico.” Paredes skillfully mapped Greater Mexico to be “all the areas inhabited by people of Mexican culture—not only within the present limits of the Republic of Mexico but in the United States as well—in a cultural rather than a political sense.”³² Defining Greater Mexico indeed had political ramifications beyond just cultural ones. I suggest Paredes’s employment of such a concept was a precursor to the transnational turn. Greater Mexico allowed for a discussion through cultural artifacts to argue that nation-states cannot fully articulate a groups’ identity. Jose Limón built on Paredes’s theory, produced a unique study describing how Texas- Mexicans situate themselves in South Texas when confronting issues of racism, capitalism, and community formation through an investigation of Tejano dance culture.³³ My work builds

³⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), 33.

³¹ Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States; A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1971[1930]), 84.

³² Américo Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border*, (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1976), xiv.

³³ Jose E. Limon, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

on this intellectual genealogy of Mexican and Chicana/o scholars attempting to articulate the Mexican Diaspora through popular dance and music.

Recent scholarship on Mexican and to a large extent, Latino music and dance continues to describe the hardship faced by Latino immigrants situated in the U.S.³⁴ Several of these studies expand a transnational framework to advance their scholarly projects on Latino music (Rivera, Marshall, Pacini Hernandez 2009; Lipsitz 2006). Latino music and dance must be spoken in terms of a transnational discourse because the migrants bring these expressive cultures when crossing borders. In addition to bodily migration, the circulation and consumption of these cultural artifacts also travel in other ways. The idea of Mexican Sonidos circulating the latest salsa songs through sonidero networks or Columbian cumbias over the internet in order for Mexican migrants to dance in Chicago becomes central in my final dissertation chapter. This topic demonstrates how sonidero enthusiasts create alternate networks that span beyond their physical surroundings.

Benedict Anderson's concept of the "imagined community" helps with understanding nationalism in a cultural sense. Anderson states that, "Communities are to be distinguished...by the style in which they are imagined."³⁵ Mexicans in the Midwest execute various forms of Mexican nationalism. Music and dance are two ways that Mexicans articulate their love for Mexico. Their love for Mexico is love for the people, its history, and the struggles people face in the motherland that forces many of migrants

³⁴ Anthony F. Macias, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935-1968*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Martha I. Chew Sánchez, *Corridos in Migrant Memory*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (London & New York: Verso, 1983), 6.

northward. Migrants' love for Mexico should not be equated with love for the Mexican nation-state. It is important we also understand the articulations of nationalism through the study of music and dance. Josh Kun argues that music performs delinquent acts by moving across multiple geopolitical borders of nation states.³⁶ These delinquent acts also include steering away from the dominant musical narratives of national groups. *Tambien Bailamos en el Norte* produces a study of delinquent acts, of altering the way Mexicans imagined themselves part of the larger imagined immigrant Mexican community flourishing in the United States.

Design and Methodology

The findings in this dissertation are a result of five years of researching Chicagoland sonidos and sonidero dance spaces for my dissertation thesis beginning in the summer of 2009. I spent multiple weekends at nightclubs, speaking with sonidos about music and migration. I focus on the experiences of undocumented Mexican sonidos ranging from ages 21-50 years old incorporated into the vast immigrant labor circuit across the Chicagoland area. I have employed pseudonyms for all my informants. Their legal names are not used at all throughout the study. In fact, I used pseudonyms for my informants' stage names to further protect their identities. I had originally intended to interview dancegoers in addition to sonidos. Unfortunately, I had to narrow my research pool to solely the sonidos due to time constraints and social dynamics that took place at the bailes. I had decided to place my focus on the sonido because these individuals were public figures at the bailes. They were always willing to discuss how they became

³⁶ Josh Kun, "Against Easy Listening: Audiotopic Readings and Transnational Sounds" in Celeste Fraser and José Esteban Muñoz. *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 289.

involved with sonidero and their personal narrative. The sonidos, especially my key informants, also welcomed me into their lives. They took me to *bailes*, invited into their homes, and willingly answered my research questions. The regular dancegoers, who solely attended *bailes* for pleasure, were often reluctant to share their personal story with a complete stranger. My interactions with dancegoers were limited to solely the *bailes*. It became clear to me that my dissertation about sonidero was heavily reliant on my working relationship with the sonidos. These factors were influential in determining the research subjects for the ethnographic portions of this thesis.

Geography also influenced the direction of my doctoral thesis. I strategically chose to study the Chicagoland region rather than confine my study to Chicago for multiple reasons. The first reason that influenced my decision of a broader geography is based on the fact that all of my informants, mentioned in this essay, live in nearby suburbs outside the city-limits of Chicago. Mexico remains the largest export of migrant labor from Latin America to this region. Second, I attended just as many *bailes* in the suburbs as I did within the actual city of Chicago. Thirdly, scholars agree that many Latinos have chosen to establish themselves in the surrounding suburbs of Chicago.³⁷ In the early stages of my research, I strictly attended *bailes* in Chicago with hopes of only devoting my scholarly attention within the city-limits. My informants inspired the intellectual expansion to the suburbs. They had purchased homes and worked in the suburbs. Many of the *bailes* were held in areas like Aurora, IL and Cicero, IL. Their lives in the suburbs, however, were still closely linked to family or friends living in Chicago.

³⁷ For a discussion on Latinos in the Suburbs, see John P. Koval, "Suburban Chicago: The Latino Capital of the Midwest." *JSRI Statistical Brief*, No. 17(2010): 1-4.; Matt Sledge, "Chicago Latino Population Spreads To Suburbs, Presenting New Regional Challenges," *Huffington Post*. October 10, 2011. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/10/chicago-latino-population-suburbs_n_923553.html.

Sonidero events or business contacts involved in the scene were also reasons for many Chicagoland sonidos to travel to the city on a weekly basis.

Newer technology also influenced how I collected my data. The sonidos and I have relied on cell phones and social media to stay in contact about sonidero events but also to maintain friendships. For example, I have called and texted my informants to define and clarify some questions about sonidero in addition to employing participant observation. I have, therefore, conducted research over the phone and via text message. I have also used social media like Facebook for some data collection. The sonidos have found ways to also benefit from our technological interactions. The sonidos have utilized me for their own research gains. For example, Sonido El Mero Bueno had me contact sellers on craigslist to inquire about DJ equipment for sale. Other sonidos have called upon me to burn music for them onto blank compact discs when they did not own personal computers. My key informants also challenged my researcher position when they relied on my social capital to serve as translator and sometimes, as an educational advisor for their children.

My experiences working with Chicagoland sonidos, most importantly, are central to this essay. I protect the identity of my research subjects by employing pseudonyms. Sonido El Mero Bueno became my key informant during my study even though I had spent significant amounts of time with numerous sonidos. Sonido Ambiente Nueva has become a central figure in my research with his clarification of some sonidero-related topics. Many of the quotes used throughout the essay are direct from my participant observations with sonidos at performances, their homes, and on the road. I spent many hours in the car with Sonido El Mero Bueno en route to performances. The car became a

significant location for my research because it allowed me to have one-on-one interactions with my key informant that resulted in formal and informal interviews. If sonidos are mobile sound systems, this multi-sited and mobile ethnography mirrors their mobility because a significant portion of the research for this dissertation was collected en route to a *baile*.

My dissertation includes five chapters and an epilogue. Chapter one, “Midwestern Mexicans in the 21st Century” presents the growing literature that is critical to the study of Mexicans in the Midwest. The chapter is divided into two parts: Mexican immigration to the United States, and Mexicans in Midwest. Chapter two is entitled, “La Cumbia Gabacha para la Gabacha: Mexican Sonidos, Latino Popular Music, and Midwestern Transnational Living.” Here I will offer detailed definitions of sonidos, sonidero and cumbia sonidera for the reader. It is followed by a content analysis of multiple cumbias sonidera centering migration. Migrants identify sonidero with Mexico City the way that norteño music is associated with Northern Mexico. This chapter hopes to understand sonidero’s transitions from Latin America to Mexico and eventually arriving to the United States. The chapter situates the sonidero subculture within the body of literature that studies transnationalism and Mexican immigrants. I argue that cumbias sonideras and sonidero formulate their own transnational social fields that mirror those of Mexican immigrants.

The third chapter, “‘Gracias a dios que los bailes me han ayudado’: The Political Economy and Symbolic Networking of Sonidero Amongst Chicagoland Sonidos,” complicates the celebratory aspects of popular music studies where money and symbolic actions deter scholars from easily concluding uncritical community formations. Chicano

Culture Studies scholars agree that Mexican immigrants in the U.S. utilize popular music to express migration experiences and community consciousness when combating racist attitudes towards Mexicans. However, there is another narrative to *sonidero* culture which needs scholarly attention—aside from community politics—which is making money. These night spaces embody a unique political economy where various individuals gain monetary gains based off of *sonidero* dances. This chapter concludes that sonidero becomes labor for many individuals such as the sonidero (person), bartenders, and waitresses rather than leisure spaces.

“*Yo Voy a Bailar!:* Reworking Cultural Citizenship/Shifting the Margins within Sonidero Dance Spaces” is the fourth chapter. This chapter challenges how scholars have theorized cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship is a response by Latino studies scholars to US juridical definitions of citizenship that denies Mexicans and Latinos, whether legal or undocumented, full rights in this country. The vastly growing sonidero scenes of Chicago and Minneapolis become case studies displaying how internal conflicts within their respective Mexican communities affect resistance to larger structures of inequality. In this chapter, I claim cultural citizenship must be discussed in relation to marginality within Mexican immigrant communities. Chicano studies scholars have noted how Mexican immigrants and their children have been alienated into social, political, and economic spheres of American society. A more radical tradition influenced by women of color feminism has advanced the concept of intersectionality, urging scholars to study how various oppressive structures such as race, class, and gender intersect rather than operate independently. In the hopes of bridging cultural citizenship and intersectionality, this chapter uses ethnographic observations at sonidero events to argue that margins exist

within immigrant social spaces. These margins allow for a critical study of sonidero, which highlights the dynamic interactions among the participants of this subculture. I introduce the term, “competing cultural citizenships,” to work through the contradictions found in popular music and immigrant communities.

Internet usages takes center stage in my fifth and final chapter of my dissertation entitled, “OrganizacionSonidera.com: Chicago Sonidos, Internet Consumption, and Latino Expressive Culture at Sonic Speeds.” This final chapter first presents how immigrant communities have been discriminated by media outlets and internet companies. However, Mexican immigrants, unauthorized or U.S. legal residents have creatively used the internet to construct social relations with their families on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Music programs broadcasted over the internet open up grassroots possibilities to create transnational cultural production among Mexican immigrants. This chapter will examine sonidero webcasts that span various Midwestern locations to discuss how immigrants articulate new music subjectivities through the use of this popular mass communication tool. *Organizacion Sonidera* and *La Pachanga Sonidera*—based in Chicago and Minneapolis respectively—both transgress physical space by forming a viewership that stretches beyond national borders.

The highlight of my study pinpoints how Mexicans use Latin American music styles like salsa and cumbia (non-native dances to Mexicans) at sonidero dance spaces to execute a nationalist discourse on the dance floor. Sonidero, I believe, is an exciting ethnographic medium, which informs us how Mexican immigrants articulate their lives and situate themselves in the burgeoning discourse of Mexican identity through popular culture. *Tambien Bailamos en el Norte* holds new understandings of how Mexican

immigrants construct competing musical narratives of Mexicandidad in the Midwest by dancing cumbia and salsa rather than post-revolutionary Mexican ballads or rancheras. If Vicente Fernandez truthfully loves his nation “en el extranjero,” he is joined by millions of Mexicans across the U.S. whose love for Mexico is also forged outside the national parameters of the Mexican nation-state. Mexican migrants, however, differ from Vicente Fernandez because they do not have the luxury to return to Mexico. They must recreate Mexico through popular culture and language use. We will see in the pages that follow how Mexicans recreate Mexico while challenging American exceptionalism.

Chapter 1

Midwestern Mexicans in the 21st Century

“A Show of Strength,” read the Chicago Tribune’s front-page headlines on March 11, 2006. The story recounted the remarkable pro-immigrant rally from the previous day. The demonstration transformed Chicago’s downtown into a space of collective action where over 100,000 participants protested House bill HR-4437 also known as the Sensenbrenner bill.^{38 39} Chicago’s streets were filled with mothers pushing strollers, kids walking out of school, and men and women skipping work to attend the massive manifestation. Protesters lifted signs that read “No to HR 4437” and “We Are Not Criminals” to show their disapproval of the bill’s intentions to criminalize undocumented immigrants. The majority of the protesters were Latinos, mostly of Mexican heritage, accompanied by Blacks, Asian Americans, and respectively, Whites. Many of the participants wore Mexico soccer shirts and raised Latin American flags. Immigrant organizers and state politicians spoke at the rally demanding immigration reform and insisting that the U.S.A. is a nation of immigrants. The marchers, mostly Latinos, were composed of blue-collar workers, students, and working professionals. Many were immigrants themselves with varying immigration statuses, and U.S. born with immigrant roots. Others, still, were allies of immigrants’ rights. The immigrant rights protest on March 10, 2006 was perhaps the biggest political mobilization in Chicago since the Haymarket riots (Mora Torres 2008; Pallares & Flores Gonzalez 2010).

38 Oscar Avila & Antonio Olivo, “A show of strength; Thousands march to Loop for immigrants' rights; Workers, students unite in opposition to toughening of law” *Chicago Tribune*, March 11, 2006.

39 HR 4437 is officially titled Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. The bill was also nicknamed the Sensenbrenner bill for Wisconsin House of Representative James Sensenbrenner. I will refer to the bill by HR 4437 or the Sensenbrenner bill from now on.

The mobilization occurred in Chicago's major downtown area. Many of the protesters do not reside in downtown due to this area being a financial district. Mexican communities, however, are located adjacent to the downtown zone like Pilsen and the former neighborhoods of the Near Westside, also known as "la Taylor".⁴⁰ Contemporary Mexican communities have also taken form in surrounding towns and suburbs near Chicago.

The Sensenbrenner Bill ignited a movement where Chicago's ethnic and racial communities banded together for immigrant justice. The bill placed illegal immigration and Mexicans at center stage of American politics once again. It had equated Mexican with "illegal" in similar fashion to the mass deportation campaigns of the 1920s and Proposition 187 had done in the nineties. The community backlash against the Sensenbrenner Bill was spearheaded by Chicagoland Mexican immigrants claiming Chicago as their city. Mexican immigrants had planted roots in Chicago through a long history of labor, businesses, property purchases, and educational establishments by the time Sensenbrenner appeared in 2006. This mass mobilization forced scholars to zoom in at the political muscle Mexicans and Latinos flexed to confront the nativist Sensenbrenner Bill. By opening this chapter with the mass mobilization of 2006, I intend to highlight how Mexicans in the Midwest continue to be a growing community with historical roots. I argue throughout this chapter that Mexicans in Chicago struggle for the

⁴⁰ "La Taylor" is reference to Taylor St. near the University of Illinois at Chicago Campus (UIC). Taylor Street was a multiethnic community prior to the construction of UIC. It consisted of Mexicans, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Italians. Mexicans used to refer to this area as "La Taylor." Houses were bulldozed and families were forced out of this neighborhood. Mexicans were pushed out of Taylor Street and into Pilsen around the 1950s. See Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Juan Mora-Torres, "Pilsen, Marcos, and the Global City," in *Marcos Raya* ed. Francisco Piña, (Chicago: Marcos Raya Project and Mexican Fine Arts Center and Museum, 2004), 28-29.

right to live and work in the Windy City even when confronted by racialized labor that challenges community formation. With this in mind, this chapter discusses the similarities and differences of Mexican migration to the U.S. in general with the specific reality of the Midwest. Migration theory is known for interrogating how immigrants become part of the larger society. Migration studies have also shown repeatedly that race, class, gender, and sexuality have shaped migrants' lives in the host country. Midwestern Mexicans broaden how we approach migration studies because this collective group constantly challenges the dominating immigration theories of assimilation and transnationalism.

This opening vignette insists that Mexican migration to the United States continues to be a hotly debated topic of discussion in public opinion and among academics. Migrants cross the Mexico-U.S. border responding to U.S. labor shortages, bi-national economic policies, fleeing political upheavals, family reunification, and personal lifestyle choices. The entire U.S. Southwest continues to receive various waves of Mexican immigrants due to U.S. economic policies, treaties, capital penetration and proximity to the northern Mexican landscape. Mexican migrants have also sought new locations than just the "traditional" places to work and formulate communities (Smith 2005; Zuniga & Hernandez-Leon 2005). Mexican migrants in the United States, however, are constantly met by acts of violence when arriving to non-traditional places. U.S. immigration policy, academic and popular discourses have also contributed to the exploited positions occupied by many Mexican migrants. Therefore, it is important Mexican migration to the U.S. continues to be woven into dialogues in migration studies. Overall discussions of Mexican immigration have provided a foundational base for

articulating general consensus regarding how Mexicans are treated in the U.S. Perhaps, it is more strategic to study a particular area of the country in order to locate migrants in these places socially, culturally, and historically.

The Midwestern United States has its own history and identity. Mexicans hold a unique experience that differs from Europeans in the Midwest. Many European immigrant groups have been accepted to share in this collective Midwestern experience. On the contrary, Mexicans have been denied such an invitation.⁴¹ Midwestern Mexicans of the 1920s and 1950s occupied low-wage labor ranks, denied acceptance into unions, and were portrayed as perpetual illegal workers.⁴² Contemporary Mexican migrants in the Midwest continue to find themselves in the same conditions as their predecessors.

The combination of U.S. citizens of Mexican descent with newly-arrived immigrants forms the larger ethnic Mexican Chicago community. The lesson learned from the 2006 march was that Mexican immigrants continue to fill Chicago's labor shortage but they collectively chose to be treated with more dignity. Protesters chanted that day, "aquí estamos, y no nos vamos, y si nos hechan, nos regresamos" (we are here, and we are not leaving, and they [ICE] deport, we will return). This chant exemplified that Chicago Mexicans desire to change the course of their future. Mexicans took to the street on the tenth of March in 2006 to claim Chicago as their city. They refused to be removed in mass deportations like Mexicans experienced in the thirties and fifties. Most importantly, contemporary Chicago Mexicans also claimed that they will return if

⁴¹ Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 7.

⁴² Juan R. García, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 79.

removed because Chicago has now become the Mexico many have grown to know in their lifetime.

Some of the questions I answer in this chapter include how Mexican immigrants form community in the Midwest while confronting nativist and racist structures? How has this community secured employment? How does this labor impact life chances? How can we study transnationalism among Mexicans in the Midwest? How can we begin to understand the Midwest to be a place where Mexicans formulate a new identity?

MEXICAN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Mexican immigration to the United States is a very complex story filled with episodes of racism and violence as Mexicans fill labor shortages. U.S. policies throughout the 20th century constructed Mexicans as “illegal aliens” invading American shores. Anti-Mexican discourses have also permeated the current 21st century. The ambivalent legal status occupied by Mexicans, however, has been created due to U.S. corporations’ preference to hire a low-wage labor force. American politicians and native born, majority White, citizens have expressed their frustrations that Mexicans “take their jobs” or have “anchor babies” in hopes of closing the border to unauthorized immigrants. Julian Samora argued that the fluctuation between open-border to closed-border policy was dependent on whether the U.S. economy was experiencing profits or financial losses.⁴³ This section demonstrates the contradictory demands for foreign low-wage workers with anti-immigrant policies intended to exploit Mexican labor in the United States.

⁴³ Julian Samora, *Los Mojados: The Wetback Story*, (Norte Dame: University of Norte Dame, 1971), 49.

Violent conflicts between Mexico and the United States date back to the mid-nineteenth century. Mexico originally invited Euro-Americans to settle in their northern territories of present-day Texas. The settlements eventually grew in numbers and the Euro-Americans began dissenting against Mexico. Formal requests and armed insurrections by Anglos followed demands for secession from Mexico. The battle of the Alamo became the turning point for Texas independence. Mexico defeated the Texas rebels but Mexico lost the following Battle of San Jacinto. Texas was declared independent in 1836. Following the Texas secession, Mexico's territories fell under siege again by the United States in 1846. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848 forced Mexico to surrender nearly half of its territory containing the current states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and Texas.⁴⁴ Immediately the absorption of the Southwestern region into the American union created a new border dividing Mexico and the U.S. along the Rio Grande. Mexicanos who remained on the U.S. side of the border following the conflict found themselves in subordinate positions. Mexicanos were promised language and religious rights by the United States. The U.S. also promised the newly acquired citizens the right to keep their property and land grants originally obtained under the Mexican and the Spanish governments. Similar to Native Americans, Mexicans were bamboozled of their land.⁴⁵

America, forty years after conquering of Mexico's northern territories, began to demonstrate many anxieties towards non-white immigrant groups arriving to the region.

⁴⁴ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* 5th Ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 2004), 57.

⁴⁵ Native Americans were forced off their land and sent to live on reservations. Many Native Americans lost their land with the Dawes Act of 1887 when the U.S. Congress transformed Indian tribal land to private property. See chapter 2 of Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

These anxieties led to severe immigration restrictions while the United States desperately needed low-wage workers. The American Party and the Know Nothing Party initiated anti-immigrant campaigns hoping to keep “America for Americans.”⁴⁶ Chinese immigrants as early as 1882 were barred from entering the country and 1907 brought a prohibition of Japanese immigrants with “The Gentlemen’s Agreement”. Historian Erika Lee shows that the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act enacted by the United States stopped the flow of Chinese migrants to the country in order to maintain a white labor class.⁴⁷

Scholars agree that when the United States closed the door on Asian immigrants and eventually Europeans, Mexican laborers were sought out to fill labor shortages.⁴⁸ Certain incentives were implemented such as waiving the head tax for Mexicans or exemptions from immigration quota laws in order to make their entry to the country more feasible. Exceptions given to Mexican laborers only existed when their labor was desired. The Temporary Admissions Program of 1917, the first bracero-like initiative, imported temporary Mexican laborer during the First World War in hopes of supplementing the labor shortages in American industries. The Temporary Admissions Program would be repeated nearly thirty years later. The years between the World Wars also witnessed a continual increase in Mexican labor. Mexican migration after WWI would eventually meet stricter regulations on behalf of the United States.

⁴⁶ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 4.

⁴⁷ Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During The Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 30.

⁴⁸ Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931: Socio-Economic Patterns* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 4; David G. Gutiérrez, “Globalization, Labor Migration and the Demographic Revolution: Ethnic Mexicans in the Late Century” in *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States Since 1960*, ed. David G. Gutiérrez, (New York: Columbia University 2004), 45.

Measures to secure America's shores from unwanted immigrants were boasted at the U.S.-Mexico border early in the 20th century. 1924 marked the creation of the Border Patrol (McWilliams 1948, 1990; Hernandez 2010). The institution of the U.S. border patrol to safeguard the two thousand mile border coincides with the many immigration laws and policies of 1924 that shaped the discussion of foreign labor.⁴⁹ Previous efforts to secure the U.S.-Mexico border mostly aimed at stopping the flow of Chinese workers. Mexicans were also under scrutiny at the border prior to the birth of the Border Patrol. For example, U.S. health and immigration officials in 1917 forced Mexican laborers to undergo hazardous baths in order to combat lice and other diseases. These baths were toxic and included gasoline and vinegar. These chemical baths were accompanied with full body inspection where the migrants had to strip to the nude. These dehumanizing inspections were only carried out at the Mexico-U.S. border.⁵⁰ Once the Border Patrol was created, Mae Ngai tells us of a different policy called, "drying out the wetbacks" where the border patrol would take Mexican workers to step one foot into Mexico only to return and be legally processed on the U.S. side.⁵¹

Pressures to secure the border coincided with a demand for labor due to increased production by large American corporations. Some of the major economic gains were made in the Southwestern United States just adjacent to the international line that divides Mexico and the United States. The mining industries of Arizona and New Mexico, the

⁴⁹For an overview of Immigration restriction see Williams S. Bernard, "A History of U.S. Immigration Policy," in *Immigration: Dimensions of Ethnicity*, ed. Reed Ueda. (Cambridge: Bellnap-Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁵⁰ David Dorado Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso & Juarez, 1893-1923*, (El Paso: Cinco Punto Press, 2005). For a digital report on the Bathtub Riots, Listen to John Burnett, "The Bath Riots: Indignity Along the Mexican Border," *NPR*, January 26, 2006, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5176177>; accessed on June 17, 2013.

⁵¹ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and The Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 153.

big agriculture business, railroad companies all needed laborers.⁵² Mexicans became the desirable workers for the undesirable jobs. Carey McWilliams highlighted that Mexicans often were given the dead end and seasonal work which kept them as temporary workers rather than a permanent labor force.⁵³ Overall, the literature shows us that Southwest economies maintained burgeoning profits by employing Mexicans as “cheap labor”.

While corporations and the American government meant to keep a temporary pool of laborers, Mexicans had numerous ties to the Southwest; making them pioneers of the region with numerous communities. Paul Taylor and Manuel Gamio documented the rapid increase of Mexican laborers throughout the U.S. including California, Texas, Chicago, and Pennsylvania. Manuel Gamio quantified the number of postal money orders sent to Mexico by immigrant.⁵⁴ Gamio also found a great number of Mexicans entered without authorization to work in the U.S. because the number of Mexicans returning to Mexico exceeded the amount of Mexicans who entered the United States during 1920-1925.⁵⁵ Taylor mapped out the *colonias* that Mexicans began shaping communities. Taylor in his gigantic attempt to locate Mexican immigrant communities also quantified the number of school children attending U.S. schools.⁵⁶ Their studies were unique for the 1930s because both had studied Mexicans living in the United States. Their analysis paid little attention to the outcomes Mexico faced due to massive immigration.

⁵² George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 19.

⁵³ McWilliams, *North From Mexico*, 197.

⁵⁴ Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States; A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971 [1931]), 4-5

⁵⁵ Ibid, 10.

⁵⁶ See Paul Taylor, “Mexican Labor in the United States: Racial Schools Statistics in California, 1927” in *University of California Publications in Economics*. Vol. 4. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930), 265-271.

The other side to the scholarly debate on Mexican immigration is the effects *emigration* had on Mexico during the early half of the twentieth century. Lawrence Cardoso offers us a depiction of Mexican emigration during several key moments in Mexico's and the United States' history. Cardoso stated, "[that] Emigration was also considered [by Mexico] to be only temporary...once peace returned to Mexico."⁵⁷ Mexico's Revolution sparked a mass migration of Mexicans to the United States. Migrants were expected to return to Mexico once order was restored to the republic and once the World War had ended. On the contrary, Mexicans who emigrated out of Mexico during the Revolution had intended to permanently settle in the U.S.

The Great Depression was another turning point for Mexican emigration because Mexico found itself welcoming back hundreds of thousands of its nationals and their U.S.-born children whom experienced repatriation during the 1930s. Chicano studies Scholar Rudy Acuña suggests as many as many as one million Mexicans and their U.S. born children were repatriated between the years, 1929-1939.⁵⁸ The stock market crash of 1929 nearly bankrupted the U.S., which then led to public debates about scarce resources and jobs. Mexicans were blamed for the economic downturn of the country, which ignited massive deportations and voluntary repatriations.⁵⁹ Mexican and Chicano scholars alike have also debated the social and political consequences felt by the Great Depression. Mexican scholar Carreras De Velasco argues that Mexico welcomed their repatriates with large social and economic programs offering land redistribution and

⁵⁷ Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931: Socio-Economic Patterns* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 60.

⁵⁸ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America*, 209.

⁵⁹ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America*, 208.

employment.⁶⁰ Velasco suggested that a heightened sense of Mexican nationalism in Mexico resulted in response to the repatriation. Lawrence Cardoso pointed out that Mexico was not prepared socially nor economically to welcome all their repatriated emigrants.⁶¹ Mexico's efforts, whether sufficient or not, to reincorporate their citizens during this time period are vital to understanding Mexican immigration to the United States.

America eventually recruited Mexican laborers again with the (in)famous Bracero program which lasted between 1942 and 1964.⁶² The Bracero program was meant to supplement the farm labor shortage during the WWII. U.S. employers pleaded to the U.S. government to extend the program.⁶³ The Bracero program was meant to curtail undocumented Mexicans migration to the United States but did the exact opposite. Employers knowingly hired unauthorized immigrants while simultaneously recruiting Braceros. Employers often served as the coyotes themselves in order to bring workers across the border. While employers purposely hired unauthorized workers and the U.S. government imported Braceros. The fate of Mexican laborers was in the hands of employers and U.S. government officials.

The United States lifted its immigration quotas during the civil rights era using the Immigration Act of 1965. The legislation was meant to attract more Europeans but in reality, the majority of immigrants arrived from Asia and Latin America. Lawmakers intended to contain Mexican migration with the Immigration Act of 1965, but

⁶⁰ Mercedes Carreras De Velasco, *Los Mexicanos Que Devolvio La Crisis, 1929-1932*, Tlatelolco, Mexico, D.F.: Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 1974), 113.

⁶¹ Ibid, 148-151.

⁶² For a great study of the Bracero program, see Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story; An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California, 1942-1960* (Charlotte, Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1964).

⁶³ Ibid, 48.

immigration from Mexico continued to rise to 52, 096 legal entrants in 1979 not including unauthorized migrants.⁶⁴ Mexicans, regardless of their exclusion from the groundbreaking law, flowed into the United States in large numbers. The enormous number of Mexicans entering the U.S. legally and unauthorized created conditions for further immigration laws.

The year 1986 was a pivotal year for immigration law with the passing of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). IRCA was colloquially coined amnesty because three million individuals legalized their immigration status with the law. IRCA's main objectives, however, were to reduce migration flows from Mexico, enhance border security, and punish employers for hiring unauthorized migrants (Cornelius 1989; Massey, Durand, & Malone 2002). Wayne Cornelius argues that while IRCA had made serious stride in its attempt to curtail migration, it did not successfully stop the flow of Mexican immigrants. His study of sending communities demonstrates that Mexicans who had not received amnesty were still anticipating migrating north.⁶⁵ Family reunification and more permanent settlement of Mexican immigrant, legal or unauthorized, continued to increase the amount of migration from Mexico.⁶⁶ The enhanced border security post-IRCA was supposed to assist with curtailing unauthorized Mexican immigration. Indeed, certain urban areas like Juarez-El Paso and San Diego-Tijuana did receive monies and

⁶⁴ David M. Reimers, "An Unintended Reform: The 1965 Immigration Act and Third World Immigration to the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 3 (1983), 10.

⁶⁵ Wayne Cornelius, "Impacts of the 1986 US Immigration Law on Emigration from Rural Mexican Sending Communities" *Population and Development* 15 (1989), 693.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 699.

additional border patrol agents. These actions led migrants to cross in more dangerous and remote areas with desert-like climates.⁶⁷

The decade following IRCA included serious controversies with regards to Mexican immigration. A series of immigration laws were implemented throughout the country. The Immigration Act of 1990 called for more border security.⁶⁸ California passed a series of bills to stop unauthorized immigration. Proposition 187 intended to prohibit undocumented immigrants from state services. The law also attempted to make state employees and officials comply with the Immigration and Naturalization Services by reporting people without proper documentation.⁶⁹ The notorious North American Free Trade Agreement was signed by Mexico, the United States, and Canada in 1994. Neoliberal trade policies swept Mexico during the later half of the nineties. Many Mexican national industries were privatized and sold to big corporations. Maquiladoras flooded Mexico's northern cities with American companies relocating their production to Mexico. Proponents of NAFTA envisioned a free flow of commerce and goods but chose to deny the free flow of people.⁷⁰ Operations Gatekeeper and Hold the Line, under the Clinton administration, rerouted migrants to less populated, desert locations in order to cross the international boundary. NAFTA and Bill Clinton's immigration, however, did not stem Mexican immigration to the United States. These actions symbolize the contradictions of immigration discourses during the nineties. American business and

⁶⁷ Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 106.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 91.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 91.

⁷⁰ Kevin R. Johnson, "Free Trade and Closed Borders: NAFTA and Mexican Immigration to the United States," *University of California, Davis Law Review* (1993-1994): 941.

government penetrated Mexico's economy. In return, Mexico lost small-scale production which set off a mass exodus of Mexican laborer to the United States.

The anti-immigrant sentiment of the nineties coincided with a major turn in migration studies. A theory emerged and challenged entrenched migration theories that studied host and natal countries as separate entities. Glick Schiller et al. define transnationalism to examine the social relations linking migrant and home communities over time and space.⁷¹ The process and theoretical framework of Transnationalism has influenced many Chicano and Mexican immigration studies. In many respects, scholars of Mexican immigration and Chicano studies predated the transnational turn. Americo Paredes theorized "Greater Mexico" to articulate Mexican culture on both side of the U.S.-Mexico border.⁷² Gloria Anzaldua before the transnational turn discussed the borderlands as a third space which "the third world grates upon the first and bleeds."⁷³ Roger Rouse studying Mexicans in Redwood City, California advances his concept of "transnational migrant circuits". Transnational migrant circuits, according to Rouse, articulate how various settlements become woven into one due to the close relations shaped by migrants, monies, goods and information.⁷⁴

Transnationalism provoked a new way of thinking about immigration. The older schools of immigration policies advocated for a temporary pool of Mexican laborers.

⁷¹ Linda Bash, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. (Australia: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1994), 7.

⁷² Américo Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border*, (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1976), xiv.

⁷³ Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera*. 3rd edition, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007 [1987]), 25.

⁷⁴ Rouse, Roger, "Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism," in *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, ed. David Gutierrez (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc.), 254.

Scholars of transnationalism refuted these ideas by demonstrating Mexican immigrants permanently settled in the United States, while simultaneously remaining involved with everyday affairs in Mexico. Paredes and Anzaldua argued against cultural purity by culturally linking Mexico and the U.S. Chicano cultural studies, inspired by Paredes and Anzaldua, advanced transnational theories to study how Mexicans formed social fields spanning across the international boundary between Mexico and the U.S.

Feminist scholars sparked their own paradigm shift by introducing gender analysis into Mexican immigration studies. Castellanos and Boehm position, “gender to be a fluid and relational construct that is always mediated by diverse contexts.”⁷⁵ Engendering migration made intellectuals view Mexicans in terms of masculinities and femininities.⁷⁶ Gender analysis had been ignored by Mexican immigration scholars prior to the eighties. Narratives of Mexican *solteros* or *solos*⁷⁷ laboring in the United States prior to the eighties heavily portrayed men as strictly laborers and did not account for gender. For example, the Bracero program only hired Mexican male migrants. A study that simply viewed the Bracero Program to have only impacted Mexican males does not understand the role gender played in this program. Engendering the Bracero Program requires that we discuss how Mexican women performed “male” and “female” work during the men’s absence or how Mexican males asserted their masculinity by providing financial support for their families with their transnational employment.

⁷⁵ Deborah A. Boehm and M. Bianet Castellanos, “Engendering Mexican Migration: Articulating Gender, Regions, Circuits,” *Latin American Perspectives* 35 (2008): 6.

⁷⁶ Patricia R. Pessar, “Engendering Migration Studies: The Case of New immigrants in the United States,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 42 (1999): 577-600

⁷⁷ *Solos* or *Solteros* means by themselves with no family. *Solteros* implies they are single; while *Solos* refers to have left their wives and children in Mexico.

A second contribution made by gender scholars was placing attention to the reality that Mexican women also migrated northward to supplement family incomes in their natal country. Wayne Cornelius noted more women and children migrated in addition to men after the passing of IRCA.⁷⁸ Aside from the actual migration, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotello and Ernestine Avila advanced their theory of “Transnational Motherhood” to describe how Mexican and Central American mothers rearrange the idea of motherhood when they [the mother] resides in one country in order to gain employment while their child[ren] remain in their country of origin. The increase of female migrants and transnational motherhood has altered how Mexican immigrant women and men live out their lives in multiple countries. Until very recent, gender was omitted in the study of human mobility. These scholars placed gender at the center of their analysis. They have moved away from seeing migration as strictly effecting Mexican males. This paradigm shift placed gender at the forefront of Mexican immigration studies. In doing so, these scholars articulate how gender is a significant component to understanding today’s global economy and the migrants who labor in it.

MEXICAN IMMIGRATION TO CHICAGO

The Midwestern region attracted Mexican immigrants with many opportunities to enter thriving workforces ranging from steel plants in Indiana, to the automotive industry of Detroit, and the meatpacking plants of Chicago’s Stock Yards to Minnesota’s sugar beet fields.⁷⁹ Migration to the Midwest comprised of Mexicans from Central Mexico and

⁷⁸ Wayne Cornelius, “Impact of the 1986 US Immigration Law on Emigration from Rural Mexican Sending Communities,” *Population and Development Review* 15 (1989) 689-705.

⁷⁹ Some great studies regarding Mexicans in the Midwest include Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Juan Ramon García, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932*. (Tucson:

labor sojourners from the U.S. Southwest following migrant trails. Mexicans gravitated to Chicago in search of employment opportunities. They found a city with poor housing, low-wages, and racial discrimination in the 1920s. Nonetheless, Mexicans formed distinct communities throughout Chicago after decades of settling in the Windy City. These communities were sustained over the years with continuing immigration from Mexico. The following pages present how Mexicans endured exploitative working conditions in Chicago and how those conditions inspired Mexicans to transform their reality in the city.

Mexican immigrants varying in class positions, language uses, and skin color have settled in Chicago. Region-specific migration, however, from Central Mexico caught the attention of scholars studying Mexicans in Chicago during the 1920s. Ruth Camblon claimed that Mexicans living in Chicago have come from nineteen states in Mexico. She then proceeded, “The greatest number have come from Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Jalisco...”⁸⁰ Taylor argued that unlike the Mexican compatriots of the Northern Mexican border states whom just migrated over the border, Mexicans originating from Central Mexico “leap-frogged” directly to Chicago and the Calumet region.⁸¹ Rosales employed the push/pull model to identify the motivating factors that brought Mexican immigrants to Chicago from this particular region.⁸² He argued the Mexican Revolution of the 1910-1917 pushed Mexican out of their homeland. The

University of Arizona Press, 1996); Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

⁸⁰ Ruth S. Camblon, “Mexicans in Chicago,” *Family VII* (1926): 208.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 25-28.

⁸² Push/pull theories have lost credibility among scholars studying Mexican immigration. The push/pull model, however, influenced Mexican immigration studies during the seventies. See J. Craig Jenkins, “Push/Pull in Recent Mexican Migration to the U.S.” *International Migration Review*, 11 (1977): 178-189 .

Cristero Rebellion also contributed a significant migration of Mexicans to Chicago.⁸³

Railroads pulled Mexicans to seek employment in Chicago industries.⁸⁴ Mexicans took jobs in Chicagoland railroad crews and also lived in boxcars owned by the railroad and steel companies that employed them.⁸⁵ The political violence of Central Mexico spearheaded a mass exodus during the 1920s. In desperate search for stability, Mexicans sought employment and housing in Chicago's neighborhoods.

The 1920s and onward show Mexicans still struggled to fully be accepted by Chicago residents. Labor organizing also became a factor for importing Mexicans to work in steel mills just as the 1920s began. Unfortunately, Mexicans were not aware employers hired them to work as strikebreakers in the steel strike of 1919.⁸⁶ Anita Jones portrayed the alienation felt by Mexican in the late twenties in the neighborhoods of South Chicago, Hull House, and the Stock Yards.⁸⁷ She described that the labor force was scarce during winters when Mexicans were "the last to arrive and the first to be laid off." The 1930s intensified job competition and nativist discourse against Mexican immigrants; voluntary and forced repatriations became commonplace in the Midwest. Chicago's Mexican community had dwindled from 21,000 in 1930s to 16,000 in 1938 due to the Great Depression.⁸⁸ Chicago employers took advantage of Mexican migrants because many occupied the unskilled labor force, they felt isolated due to separation from

⁸³ Ann M. Martinez, "Bordering on the Sacred: Religion, Nation, and U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1929." (PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2003), 43.

⁸⁴ Rosales, "The Regional Origins of Mexican Immigrants to Chicago During the 1920s," 192.

⁸⁵ Gabriela Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago*, 45; Crystal Yednak, "'Boxcar camp' was first stop to American dream: Life of a Mexican-American whose roots in Aurora go back to 1923 is celebrated" *Chicago Tribune* June 13, 2006.

⁸⁶ Michael Innis-Jiménez, *Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1940*, (New York: New York University, 2013), 32.

⁸⁷ Anita E. Jones, *Conditions Surrounding Mexicans in Chicago* (M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1928), 62.

⁸⁸ Juan Garcia, *Mexicans in the Midwest: 1900-1932*, 234.

Mexico, and Mexican migrants tended to have debt with employers for transportation costs. The years during 1920-1940 placed Mexicans at a disadvantage in Chicago because they experienced low-wages, forced to work as strikebreakers, and endured mass repatriation. Conditions in the following decades are similar to the ones Mexicans found in the twenties and thirties.

Immigrants from Mexico confronted the racial tensions in Chicago by forming various types of social groups. *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932*⁸⁹ by Juan Garcia examines the importance, not only on labor, but of Mexican Mutual Aid Societies. Dr. Garcia even discussed the importance of the kind of social life Mexicans had in the Midwest. He emphasizes baseball leagues, movie theaters, theater companies which Mexicans created were central to immigrants' lives.⁹⁰ Gabriela Arredondo highlights in her recent study *Mexican Chicago* that Mexicans in Chicago formed civic organizations and participated in festivities strictly for their nationals in order to combat anti-Mexican sentiment expressed throughout the city.⁹¹ Garcia and Arredondo both convincingly argue that Mexicans in the Midwest utilized creative ways to combat race and construct a collective Mexican identity.

World War II sparked another demand for low-wage Mexican labor to work in Chicago industries.⁹² Richard Santillan argued Mexican-American women became Rosita the Riveter with their contribution to the war efforts by working in Midwestern

⁸⁹ Juan Garcia, *Mexicans in the Midwest: 1900-1932*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

⁹⁰ Ibid, 191-222.

⁹¹ Gabriela Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-1939* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 9-11.

⁹² 15,000 braceros were imported to work in Chicago during WWII. See, Louise Año Nuevo Ker. "The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1976), 121.

industries. Mexican American women happily contributed to the war effort even when they confronted “race and sex discrimination” in Midwestern industries.⁹³ Julian Samora and Richard Lamanna concluded in their study of East Chicago that Mexican and Mexican Americans were at the lowest levels of the labor force.⁹⁴ The labor force, overall, did indeed alienate Mexicans in the Midwest as soon as they arrived. The Midwest regardless of all the injustices continued to be a destination for Mexicans to migrate from Mexico. The number of Mexicans in Chicago and the Midwest dwindled again in the fifties when U.S.-sponsored deportations under “Operation Wetback,” after the end of WWII. Mexicans had found themselves on the margins in Chicago again in the postwar era. The injustices faced by Mexican immigrants leading up to, and after, “Operation Wetback” did not halt immigration from Mexico. According to Nicholas DeGenova, Chicago’s Mexican community experienced its greatest increase of immigrants from 55, 600 in 1960 to 352,560 in 1990.⁹⁵ The anti-immigrant policies in the fifties coupled with increase of Mexican immigration in the sixties created a milieu for Chicago’s second-generation Mexicans to affiliate more with their parent’s culture and build stronger ties to Mexico.

The assimilation debate concerning migration scholars on a broader consensus was also tackled by students of Mexican migration, particularly to the Midwest. Carey McWilliams argued, in the forties, “Mexicans have been brought into much sharper and

⁹³ Richard Santillán, “Rosita the Riveter: Midwest Mexican American Women during World War II, 1941-45.” In *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies: Mexicans in the Midwest*, ed. Juan R. García, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 127.

⁹⁴ Julian Samora and Richard A. Lamanna, *Mexican-Americans in a Midwest Metropolis: A Study of East Chicago*. (Los Angeles: University of California, 1967) 79.

⁹⁵ Nicholas De Genova, *Working The Boundaries: Race, Space, and “Illegality” in Mexican Chicago* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005), 116.

fuller contact with Anglo-American culture than in the Southwest” in the industrial Midwestern region.⁹⁶ Groundbreaking scholar Louis Año Nuevo Kerr refutes McWilliams’s argument with her research on Chicanos in Chicago in the seventies. Kerr recognizes several social gains had been made at the start of WWII aiding “Chicanos in Chicago [to become] Mexican American rather than Mexican in culture as well as in legal citizenship.”⁹⁷ She concludes, however, that Chicago’s Mexican and Chicano communities aborted assimilation by the seventies.⁹⁸ Kerr stresses the repatriation of Mexicans shortly after the Great Depression and “Operation Wetback” of 1954 were major factors for Mexicans and Chicanos to abandon assimilation.⁹⁹ Lilia Fernandez confers Chicago Mexicans abandoned the path to assimilation after experiencing urban renewal during the Mexican American generation and subscribing to Chicano nationalism in the sixties and seventies.^{100 101}

Contemporary ethnographies of Mexicans in the Midwest confirm that Mexican continue to find themselves in the same exploited position of their predecessors from earlier migrations. Chris Liska Charger documents, in *Of Borders and Dreams*, the harsh realities Mexican and families face in Chicago’s urban educational system.¹⁰² Charger claims Mexicans are constantly crossing physical and symbolic borders in Chicago. She

⁹⁶ Carey McWilliams. *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* New Edition, Updated by Matt S. Meier. (New York, Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 1948, 1990), 201.

⁹⁷ Louise Año Nuevo Kerr, "The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970.", 69.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 214.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 1-3.

¹⁰⁰ Lilia Fernandez. "From the Near West Side to 18th Street: Mexican Community Formation and Activism in Mid-Twentieth Century Chicago." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 98, no. 3 (2005): 162-83.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion on the political departure from the Mexican American intellectual tradition to Chicano nationalism on a national level see Carlos Muñoz Jr. *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* 9th printing. (London & New York: Verso Press, 2000), 127-130.

¹⁰² Chris Liska Carger, *Of Borders and Dreams: A Mexican-American Experience of Urban Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).

centered the Juarez family in her book to depict how Mexican children deal with race and unequal schooling while the parents worry about labor and neighborhood violence.

Nicholas DeGenova, in *Working the Boundaries*, examines the legal production of citizenship to justify a politics of illegality towards Mexican migrants in Chicago.¹⁰³ The author tackles the polemic position Mexicans find themselves in Chicago as needed laborers but constrained as illegal due to the construction of citizenship that marks them as undocumented. Chazner and DeGenova suggest Mexican immigrants continue living on the margins in Chicago's labor force and mainstream institutions.

DeGenova also contributes to transnationalism with his definition of "Mexican Chicago." According to DeGenova, "Mexican Chicago...is a Chicago that is practically and materially implicated in Mexico..."¹⁰⁴ For DeGenova, Chicago and Mexico are not mutually exclusive regardless of the separation by thousands of miles. As evidence, many individuals continue their social relations with family members in Mexico. Marcia Farr has also been influenced by the transnational turn in her study of Michoacán-born Mexican Rancheros residing in Chicago. She examines the Rancheros as complex socially and bodily agents with contradictory meanings of ideal Mexicanness and backwardness¹⁰⁵ who construct social and cultural realities extending between Michoacán and Chicago. DeGenova and Farr were preoccupied with the social constructions of transnational Mexican lives in Chicago. Elaine Peña intervenes in this conversation by studying the transnational construction of sacred spaces in Des Plaines, Illinois. Peña

¹⁰³ Nicholas De Genova, *Working The Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Marcia Farr, *Rancheros in Chicagoacán: Language and Identity in a Transnational Community* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 7.

provides the example of the construction of the Second Tepeyac of North America which is a replica of the shrine in the basilica dedicated to la Virgen de Guadalupe. The author argues that sacred spaces are also transnational but serve as a base for immigrants' rights.¹⁰⁶ Peña's also argues Guadalupan devotees in a Chicagoland suburb create a base for Latino solidarity.

The Chicagoland area is home more Latino groups than simply Mexicans. Mexicans share this region with Puerto Ricans, Caribbean, and Central & South American Latinos. Latinos sharing Chicago communities has been met with celebration and challenges ranging from moments of solidarity to group competition for jobs. The use of the terms, "Hispanic" and "Latino" drew much debate among scholars and community activists.¹⁰⁷ There are various camps that offer critiques of "Hispanic" and "Latino." One camp criticizes the identity marker, Hispanic because the term only emphasizes the Spanish roots of Latinos. The "Latino" term also draws criticism because it erases the diverse nationalities and histories associated with each Latin American country. The creation of a single identity was not the only competing issues facing the people in the U.S. who traced their roots to Latin America. Each Latin American immigrant and their children experienced different migration histories. Their respective countries of origin held unique relations with the United States that contributed to their migration. For example, Puerto Ricans were encouraged to migrate in the fifties due to the failure of industrialization through Operation Bootstrap. Central and Southern Americans confronted waves of government repression and violence directly linked to

¹⁰⁶ Elaine Peña, "Beyond Mexico: Guadalupan Sacred Space Production and Mobilization in a Chicago Suburb," *American Quarterly* 60 (2008):725.

¹⁰⁷ David Hayes-Bautista & Jorge Chapa, "Latino Terminology: Conceptual Bases for Standardized Terminology." *American Journal of Public Health* 77 (1987): 61-68.

U.S. foreign policy. Yet, only a small number of people were given the legal right to migrate north. The majority of Central and Southern Americans fled these desperate situations without the blessing of any government. Many more were not legally welcomed to the United States.

These particular migration histories along with individual worldviews present a challenge for Mexicans in Chicago. The sharing of physical and social space also complicates the Mexican experience in Chicago involving moments of solidarity and conflict in the name of national pride and job competition. Internal difference among the various Latino groups highlights how difference is significant to asserting a racial/ethnic Latino identity. Many second-generation or third generation children of Mexican descent depart from the Latino/Hispanic identity marker by simply identifying as Mexican. The Mexican community is also filled with their own internal difference. For example, indigenous Mexicans experience more racial violence compared to lighter-skinned Mexicans. These differences are also found in language practices, gender, popular culture, and settlement patterns.

CONCLUSION

The literature presented in this chapter highlights the tenuous relationship between American society and Mexican laborers and how that relationship takes shape in America's Midwestern region. In many respects, Mexicans have been used as disposable workers in a competitive American economy. Employers and the American government alike cooperated to only hire these workers as temporary solutions to burgeoning labor shortcomings in the agriculture and industrial sectors of the U.S. Efforts like Operation Wetback attempted to ensure Mexican immigrants did not settle in this country.

However, Mexican immigrants and the U.S.-born descendants have established barrios in the Southwest and across all over the U.S. including the Midwest.

Earlier Mexican migration works were revised by Chicana Feminist scholars who wanted to give voice to women and other marginalized sectors of the Mexican community. Feminist immigration scholars have taken note that migration is not solely a male experience but that women and children also migrate in significant numbers. Due to family reunification and need to contribute to family household incomes, female Mexican workers have also joined the American workforce. Their participation in the workforce has also altered the way immigration scholars study familial and social arrangements as in the case of transnational motherhood.

The 21st century poses a new set of challenges for Mexican immigrants in Chicago. Just like Mexican immigrants, anti-immigrant sentiments also flourished in the Midwest. The sponsoring senator of HR-4437 hailed from Wisconsin not a border state. It is no surprise that Mexicans in Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, and St. Paul marched in large numbers contesting 2006's immigration bill. The Sensenbrenner Bill of 2006 set the foundation for Arizona and Alabama to enact state versions of the latter bill to enforce draconian measures to criminalize undocumented immigrants. Strides for immigrant justices have arrived in small doses. The Dream Act has only passed in a small number of states rather than at the federal level. In response to its failure in Congress, President Obama placed an executive order allowing undocumented youth, whom were brought by their parents, to obtain a worker's permit and access to education. The number of undocumented youth eager to legalize their status crowded Chicago's Navy Pier at the first Deferred Action informational.

A broader immigration reform including the parents of the Dreamers has yet to be passed in Congress. The latest proposal would mirror IRCA where Congress will continue to finance more technology and manpower to secure the border in exchange for the legalization of millions of undocumented immigrants. A second shortcoming of the latest proposed immigration bill is the proposed ten-year waiting period immigrants must endure in order to finally legalize their status. Hence, the U.S. will continue to enjoy an exploited laboring class of mostly Mexican, Latin American, and Asian workers for at least another decade. Undocumented immigrants who anticipate legalization will have to pay penalties and continue to obey the law or pose a threat to national security.

The political climate has changed since 2006 with the mass mobilizations that killed Sensenbrenner. Immigrant activists have not enjoyed large mobilizations since 2006 and 2007. Many undocumented immigrants and Latino-focused policy groups have been faced with continual immigration raids. More state-level immigration laws have been enacted and challenged in the Supreme Court. It is clear immigration is now a polarizing issue in the United States. Mexicans have found themselves being the scapegoats again. The current-day anti-Mexican immigrant consensus adopted by many Americans led many Mexicans, of varying immigration statuses, to seek quotidian forms of cultural resistance and community consciousness. While many families await Congress to decide the fate of immigration reform, Chicago Mexicans continue working and living in the city. It does not keep them from driving their kids to school and holding hometown association meetings. Employment opportunities continue attracting Mexicans to the region and in doing so; Mexicans expand the already existing communities throughout the Chicagoland area.

Chapter 2

La Cumbia Gabacha para la Gabacha: Mexican Sonidos, Latino Popular Music, and Midwestern Transnational Living

Mexican men and women fill the dance floor turning and spinning each other to the latest cumbias in Chicago's nightclub, *El Disco* on Friday nights. The club lights are flashing red, purple, and green accompanied with artificial smoke fog that fill the dance floor. Every bar stool is occupied by patrons socializing with friends while bartenders and waitresses take their next drink order. Sonidos play the latest cumbia and salsa songs for the crowd to dance. *El Disco*, a nightclub on Chicago's Southside, is a popular location for individuals wanting to attend sonidero bailes¹⁰⁸ in the Windy City. Clubs across the country are filled weekend long with patrons participating in the sonidero movement. Local nightclubs like *El Disco* are frequented by Mexican immigrants throughout U.S. cities like Athens, Georgia and Salt Lake, Utah.

These dances highlight how Mexican immigrants construct transnational dance practices in the United States of America. Mexican immigrants in the U.S are heterogeneous in culture, labor positions, and even settlement patterns. This chapter investigates contemporary experiences of Mexican immigrants with a close reading of cumbias sonidera. In many respects, cumbia sonidera (the song) and sonidero (the subculture) depart from older models of Mexican music and culture such as conjunto or corrido, which document the violent conflicts of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Cumbia sonidera falls under the "música tropical" genre emphasizing on urban and Caribbean music rhythms. I suggest this qualifier because cumbia takes different meanings in

¹⁰⁸ Baile is the Spanish word for dance in reference to the physical space not the activity. I will use baile and dance interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

various regions throughout Mexico. Unlike other Mexican cumbia styles, cumbia sonidera has a close affinity to Mexico City and heavily stresses its connection to Colombia.

Scholars can imagine community formation in several contexts. One important of aspect of a community is their artistic expressions. Sarah Daynes states, “Many people, when they move, bring their music with them, before anything else...As soon as a community arrives in a foreign country, it organizes networks in order to get...cassettes and compact discs.”¹⁰⁹ In addition to CDs sales, diasporic communities also organize networks to bring singers, movie stars and celebrities from their natal countries to perform in the host country. Vicente Fernandez, Maldita Vecindad, Café Tacuba and Ramon Ayala constantly perform in the United States for their immigrant compatriots. In the case of sonidero, there is a steady flow of sonidos traveling from Mexico City and surrounding areas like Puebla and Ciudad Neza to perform for their fans in the United States. Some of the more well-know sonidos have traveled to Chicago and suburban communities in Minnesota to engage with the sonidero movement in American cities.

For Mexicans in the U.S., cumbia sonidera highlights the Mexican cultural tensions between old vs. new and urban vs. rural. Moving beyond corridos, I argue that cumbia sonidera represents contemporary ways Mexicans articulate the migration processes through song and dance. The chapter is divided into three parts. First, I present a short history of sonidero and cumbia in Mexico. The following section lays a theoretical groundwork for “cumbia sonidera.” Lastly, I produce a close reading of

¹⁰⁹ Sarah Daynes, “The Musical Construction of the Diaspora: The case of Reggae and Rastafari,” in *Music, Space, and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*, ed. Sheila Whitely, Andy Bennett, & Stan Hawkins (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 25.

cumbias sonidera lyrics to merge the fields of transnationalism with popular music and dance.

EXPLORING SONIDERO

I must first clarify the difference between the *sonido*¹¹⁰ as the performer and *sonidero* the social dance space. *Sonido* loosely translates to sound but it is a very complex term in the sonidero world. On one occasion, a prominent *sonido* made the distinction between *sonido* and *sonidero* with this phrase, “Sonidero es la palabra nueva...pero no es la palabra correcta. La palabra correcta es *sonido*”¹¹¹ (*Sonidero* is the new word...it is not the accurate word. The correct word is *sonido*). He politely corrected me with his response. These words were professed by a pioneer *sonido* from Mexico City when I posed the question what is *sonidero*? This seasoned *sonido* highlighted the tensions between newer generations of performers who identified as *sonideros* and the pioneers who remained loyal to the original *sonido* identity. While he acknowledged the newer catch phrase, his alliance to the older term highlights how clarification is needed for the reader. I will not use *sonido* and *sonidero* interchangeably throughout the thesis. For the sake of consistency, I will follow Amistad Caracas’s choice of terminology. I will use *sonido* when referring to the performer and *sonidero* when speaking of the social dance space. I offer a brief history and description of *sonidos* and *sonidero* in order to avoid confusion with terminology.

Sonidero is the social dance space with a Mexican *Sonido* playing *música tropical* while simultaneously communicating words and messages to the crowd over the music

¹¹⁰ Many contemporary *sonidos* identify themselves as *sonideros*. In order to avoid confusion for my readers, I use *sonido* when referring to the performer and *sonidero* when referring to the cultural style.

¹¹¹ Interview with *Sonido Amistad Caracas* in Chicago, 2011.

(see figure 1). It is not simply a music genre or a dance move. Cathy Ragland describes the “sonidero” as a Mexican deejay with enormous sound systems playing popular cumbias while delivering nostalgic shout outs [or *saludos*]. I have found in my research that sonidos are very explicit in considering themselves more than deejays.¹¹² Sonido Ambiente Nueva succinctly defined the difference between deejay and sonido with his statement, “Somos Sonideros [Sonidos], no somos DJs, no mixteamos [referring to DJ mixing or scratching], dejamos la canción correr y mandamos saludos,” (We are sonideros [sonidos] not DJs, we do not mix, we play songs in their entirety and send shout outs).¹¹³ Sonidos alter their voices with Yamaha SPx90 special effects machines to achieve voice distortion. The voice alteration is used during the delivery of the *saludo*. I have witnessed sonidos also use the *saludo* to create a playful environment by *vacilando* (poking fun) with other sonidos or dance participants. On many occasions, the sonido team consists of the sonido who engineers the sound and delivers the *saludos* along with a set of *chavos*¹¹⁴ who run lights, and collect *saludos* for the sonidos to read. The *chavos* also assist in setting up the steel truss structure and wiring the *bocinas* (speakers). Deborah Pacini describes sonideros as mobile sound systems.¹¹⁵ Sonidos can easily spend anywhere from \$2,000-\$5,000 dollars for their mobile sound system consisting of speakers, subwoofers, amplifiers, mixers, road cases, DJ headphones, club lights, fog machines, special effect machines, and CDs.

¹¹² Fieldnote, June 26, 2009

¹¹³ Conversation with Ambiente Nueva, July 2013.

¹¹⁴ Chavo(s) loosely translated to dude or boy. It is a colloquial phrase among Mexicans. I employ Chavo(s) throughout the essay to refer to a sonido’s crew member or stagehand as in theater or sound engineering. Los chavos de El Mero Bueno assist with running lights, setting up speakers, or the steel truss structures found in sonidero bailes.

¹¹⁵ Deborah Pacini, *Oye como va!: Hybridity and Identity in Latino Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 125.

According to Helena Simonett, sonidero is not a new phenomenon. Simonett argues that this popular dance form originated and grew largely popular in Mexico City roughly over thirty years ago.¹¹⁶ Pioneer Sonido La Changa has gone on record stating he has been a sonido for over forty years.¹¹⁷ It is in Mexico City and surrounding towns like Ciudad Neza where sonidero festivals reach attendance markers in the thousands. These festivals tend to occur in large public spaces like the popular Mexico City barrio de Tepito. Sonidos play *música tropical* (Latin American tropical music) at sonidero events. I am informed by Héctor Fernández L’Hoeste’s definition of *música tropical* as “Latin American music not associated with Mexico” (L’Hoeste, 2007, 40).¹¹⁸ Cumbia and salsa are the preferred genres of *música tropical* danced at sonidero bailes (Ragland, 2003; Simonett, 2008). Helena Simonette mentions that Nuyorican and South American versions of salsa became popular in the 80s at sonidero bailes.¹¹⁹ Other forms of *música tropical* played by sonidos include guaracha, mambo, and gaitas. Sonidos also include contemporary Caribbean dance crazes like *bachata* and *merengue* to their playlists.

There are multiple characteristics that create the social dance space known as sonidero. Some of those items include the dances, the internet programs, the *vallenato* style cumbias, salsas romanticas, the sound equipment and their hyperbolic clothing designs. Sonidero construct social spaces where Mexican migrants recreate the type of dances held in Mexico City. The sonidero bailes consist of multiple actors including the

¹¹⁶ Helena Simonett, “Quest for the Local: Building Musical Ties Between Mexico and the United States” in *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, ed. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid (Landham: Lexington Books, 2008).

¹¹⁷ Radio interview with Locquillo on Minneapolis’s radio station, *La Invasora*, 1400AM, March 5, 2010.

¹¹⁸ Hector Fernandez L’Oeste, “All Cumbias, The Cumbia: The Latin Americanization of a Genre” *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame* (Durham & London, 2007), 340.

¹¹⁹ Helena Simonett, “Quest for the Local,” 124.

sonido, cumbia music groups, salsa singers, clubs de baile (dance groups) and the dancers in attendance. People who enjoy sonidero for the most part originate in the state of Mexico and Puebla. Sonidero fans often subscribe to a cosmopolitan Latin American musical sensibility while disassociating from the northern rural Mexican *vaquero* aesthetic that we see in corridos and musica norteña.¹²⁰ Ragland's study of sonidero danced by Mexicans in New York advances that the sonidos and dance participants collectively construct transnational social spaces through this expressive culture. Ragland examines the importance of the sonido as the messenger of *saludos* (shout outs and dedications) delivered over the microphone. She states, "...his [the sonido's] most important job is reading the dedications and salutations given to him by the young dancers"¹²¹ Her research examines how sonidos performing the dedication at the dancers' request constructs transnational spaces when she writes, "the sonidero takes them [referring to the dancers] from Queens to Oaxaca, from Puebla to Patterson."¹²² Chicagoland sonidos also create transnational spaces through the *saludos* by reading off dancers' messages from scrap paper or via text messages. These performers also enjoy claiming local Chicagoland identities. It is common for sonidos to glorify the neighborhoods of Chicago or the metropolitan area where a baile is in progress. One example of such activity occurred during a baile in October of 2010. A sonido proclaimed, "Ya llegamos a Elgin," referring to the town that housed the dance but also

¹²⁰ Rafaela Castro, *Chicano folklore: A Guide to the Folktales, Traditions, Rituals and Religious Practices of Mexican Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 235.

¹²¹ Cathy Ragland, "Mediating Between Two Worlds", 8.

¹²² Ibid, 8.

to the emerging Mexican immigrant community taking form in the town.¹²³ The fusion of local and transnational saludos serves the purpose of identity formation at the dances. The sonidos in my study employed saludos and other verbal expressions to forge a community that merges the Chicagoland area with Mexico City.

Sonidos also rely on visuals to create transnational spaces within the bailes. In almost every dance, sonidos use portable projectors and DVD players to play video recordings on a wall during the dance. These video recordings often project previous dances that occurred in Mexico City's barrios with notable sonidos. In other occasions, sonidos project their own performances previously recorded in U.S. nightclubs. These video recordings usually show sonidos reading the crowd's saludos and engineering sound. In addition to the sonido, the tapings also show lots of footage of dancers in action. Couples are shown executing elaborate cumbia moves inside *ruedas* (dance circles). The recordings aid in constructing transnational spaces at sonidero bailes by fusing a social field between the U.S. communities hosting the dances and Mexico City's barrios.

CUMBIA SONIDERA

One piece of evidence supporting sonidero participants prefer more Latin American sounds is the privileging of cumbia. The origins of this music genre can be trace to Colombia. Peter Wade's study of Colombian music concluded that cumbia in style and dance was originally sexually and racially subservient to Colombian nationhood. The discourse suggests cumbia was a courtship dance where African men

¹²³ Elgin, Illinois is located forty miles from Chicago. Author's fieldnote, October 11, 2010. The Mexican and Latino population, according to Census data, continues to grow at rapid rates. See Elginite, February 15, 2011, "Elgin Hispanic population surges 45%," *The Elginite Blog*. Retrieved from <http://elginite.org/blog/2011/02/15/elgin-hispanic-population-surges-45/>.

and Indigenous women danced in circles around musicians. The genre, however, has enjoyed global popularity. Hector Fernandez L’Hoeste argues “Music has long been a fruitful site for scholarship on transnationalism, for its illumination of the ways that the local is produced through the global cultural circulation.”¹²⁴ He defends his thesis by successfully mapping cumbia in many Latin American countries. Cumbia holds multiple transnational relationships with Latin America. For example, Argentina’s *cumbia villera* is known for representing black and poor Argentinians living in the slums but has currently been co-opted by middle-class white elites. *Cumbia villera* was made possible in Argentina because this new variation of cumbia borrowed many components of its Colombian counterpart.

The most significant circulation of cumbia has been to Mexico. Cumbia in Mexico, as early as the 1960s, was embedded into the umbrella genre, ‘musica tropical’.¹²⁵ Carmen Rivero y su Conjunto was among the pioneer musical groups to introduce cumbia to Mexico during the 1960s. La Sonora Dinamita aided with the importation of cumbia to Mexico when Lucho Argain (band leader of La Sonora Dinamita) moved the band from Colombia. The importation of Colombian cumbia was eventually followed with cumbia recordings “hecho en Mexico” (made in Mexico). Cumbia recordings were transformed in Mexico. For example, the accordion was substituted with the organ; and bands reduced the numbers of musicians.¹²⁶ Groups like

¹²⁴ Hector Fernandez L’Oeste, “All Cumbias, The Cumbia: The Latin Americanization of a Genre” 338.

¹²⁵ See Peter Wade, *Music, Race & Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); David Stigberg, “Foreign Currents during the 60s and 70s in Mexican Popular Music: Rock and Roll, the Romantic Ballad, and the Cumbia” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 4 (1985): 170-187.

¹²⁶ Dario B. Arboleda, “Mundo de fronteras: colombianos en la línea noreste de México y Estados Unidos” *Revista Trayectorias*, 25 (2007): 90.

Los Cardenales de Nuevo Leon incorporated cumbia to enrich the *norteña* music scene. The 1990s witnessed technocumbia popularized by quebradita bands with faster-paced rhythms like Banda El Mexicano's "No bailes el caballito." El Gran Silencio offered more contemporary cumbia fusing hip-hop aesthetics mixed with Colombian features to create their Monterrey-based "chuntaro style." These variations of cumbia are region-specific throughout Mexico as in the case of Los Cardenales de Nuevo Leon who fuse cumbia with northern Mexican cultural norms.

The popularity of cumbia in Mexico City, according to Mexican journalist Toño Carrizosa, is attributed to Mexican sonidos. Carrizosa argues that sonidos were the driving force to popularizing cumbia in Mexico City for two very important reasons. The first reason was correlated to entertainment cost. Carrizosa suggests it was cheaper to hire a sonido to provide the music selection and sound equipment than contracting a big orchestra band to perform at private parties or street festivals.¹²⁷ The second and most important reason sonidos popularized cumbia in Mexico City had to do with cumbia being a new attractive rhythm to Mexicans.¹²⁸ The dissemination of Colombian cumbia was so intense that pioneer sonidos of the late fifties and early sixties traveled regularly to Colombia in search of the latest cumbia recording.¹²⁹ Cumbia's popularity in Mexico City reached great heights due to the dedicated work of sonidos like La Changa that the city's own barrio El Peñon de los Baños was nicknamed, "La Colombia chiquita" (Little Colombia), by sonidos.¹³⁰ The early sonidos privileged cumbia in their playlists and their

¹²⁷ Toño Carrizosa, "La onda grupera : historia del movimiento grupero" (México, D.F. : Edamax, 1997), 100.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 100.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 101.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 100.

fans responded positively. This outcome made it easy for Mexico City sonidero enthusiasts to later claim cumbia as theirs.

Mexico's claim to cumbia, however, exceeded the Mexico City barrios where sonidero had been born. Mexican Cultural critic Carlos Monsivais argued that cumbia has been nationalized "Mexican".¹³¹ Monterrey has also claimed Colombian cumbia in similar fashion to Mexico City's sonidero movement. It is evident cumbia as a cultural product has emigrated out of Colombia and into Mexico. I propose to expand Carlos Monsivais's argument to include the U.S. I will not go as far to say that cumbia is nationalized "American" but that it continues to migrate to new territories. Rather, cumbia's prominence amongst Mexicans in the United States further concretizes Monsivais's notion of cumbia being "Mexican" by employing Americo Paredes' concept of Greater Mexico.¹³²

Greater Mexico has been useful to map out the cultural presence of Mexicans and their descendants in the United States. Greater Mexico has also witness multiple music genres produce the soundtrack of the Mexican immigrant experience. Scholars agree the U.S.-Mexico borderlands are a site of struggle in Chicano popular music.¹³³ In *Border Matters*, Saldivar studies "La jaula de oro" (the Gilded Cage), performed by *Los Tigres del Norte*. Saldivar illustrates the contradictions experienced by a Mexican immigrant in California who enjoys financial stability at the expense of social alienation from his

¹³¹ Carlos Monsivais, "Vallenato y cumbia se nacionalizan mexicanos" *La Jornada*, April 26, 2001.

¹³² Américo Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero*, xiv.

¹³³ For a pioneer study of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and ballads, see Américo Paredes, *With his Pistol in his Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero*, 11th Printing (Austin: University of Texas, 1998 [1958]).

children and immigration officials.¹³⁴ The positioning of cumbia in Greater Mexico better illustrates how cumbia sonidera and sonidero spaces have enjoyed much popularity in the United States.

“Mexican Cumbia is perhaps the best known in the United States.”¹³⁵ Sonidero has taken cumbia from Colombia to Mexico and now the United States. Cumbia is the staple music genre of sonidero. The correlation between sonidero and cumbia has been well-established in the U.S. to the degree that larger media forces have coined the term, *cumbia sonidera*. One attribute of a cumbia sonidera would be the already embedded sonido-esque saludos in the songs. Cumbia groups like Grupo Kual have benefitted from the usage of cumbia sonidera as their songs become staples at sonidero bailes. These groups include a vocalist whose voice has been altered to deliver a saludo (normally be delivered by a sonido) in their songs. The existence of cumbia sonidera is debatable because many sonidos claim they simply play cumbia. Most sonidos simply interpolate cumbia as *musica de Colombia* (Colombian music). Often, the catch phrase, “cumbia sonidera” is employed by large music industry conglomerates on compact discs (CDs) and compilation albums to maximize sales. Cumbia sonidera has become a real material and discursive component of sonidero because it is consumed and circulated in the form of a music genre due to the workings of music marketers.

Sonidero dances incorporate multiple kinds of Latin American music on their play list. Cumbia is only one of those genres. Yet the sonidero music scene has created a distinct style called “cumbia sonidera” which is a variation of Mexican cumbia. Cumbia

¹³⁴ Jose David Saldivar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 1997), 6.

¹³⁵ Hector Fernandez L'Oeste, “All Cumbias, The Cumbia: The Latin Americanization of a Genre,” 354.

sonidera has been fashioned specifically for sonidero dances. In many occasions, sonidos record their performances on CDs which are then sold to dance participants. These recorded performances are sold in flea markets or mercados throughout Mexico and the United States. In more formal settings, official record companies acquire the rights to these recordings and sell cumbias with prominent sonidos' added saludos in packaged CDs at big box stores.

Cumbia has also paved the way for music groups to make a name for themselves among sonidero fans. Groups like la Cumbia, Grupo Soñador, and Grupo Kual profit from sonidero because they have become staple artists guaranteed to perform at massive sonidero dances across the United States. Salsa groups like Grupo Niche and soloist Willie Gonzalez, tour the same event circuits of cumbia sonidera groups to perform their Caribbean sounds for sonidero enthusiasts. Cumbia sonidera groups occupy the stage during dances to perform their more recent cumbias to a live audience. Sonidos eventually incorporate cumbias sonideras created by contemporary music groups in their routine playlists. These groups emphasize their strong use of the guacharaca, tambores, and accordion—traditional instruments found in cumbia and vallenato. Additional musical instruments are incorporated into cumbia sonidera like congas, a horn section, keyboard pianos, and bass guitars. Groups often proclaim in their songs which instrument is being heard at the given moment to emphasize the traditional aspects of cumbia. La suerte sonidera, for examples, yells, “Tambores, tambores, tamobores bores bores bores,” to their listeners so the audience recognizes the presence of the drum.

Scholars and journalists who have discussed sonidero emphasize the role of the saludo by the sonido on the microphone over the music. This important action marks the

sonidero movement distinct from other music scenes and genres. Yet, what is lacking is a discussion about the saludos already incorporated in cumbias sonideras. Groups specializing in cumbia sonidera usually have one band member who executes the saludo while the rest of the musicians perform the song. The implanted saludo in the music is a component of the cumbia sonidera which separates it from other types. Grupo Kual proclaims, “El poder de la cumbia...en Mexico” (The power of cumbia in Mexico) Cumbia sonidera groups deliver saludo like the given example which are mostly done by a distorted voice with electronic sounds. The distorted voice is a key strategy to separate the sonido-esque messenger from the lead singer. These saludos are directed to specific people who performers wish to acknowledge. In other instances, *saludos* are sent to distant geographic locations. Cumbias sonideras including inserted *saludos* do not make the sonido obsolete. Cumbia sonidera only contains pre-recorded saludos. Sonidos are still responsible for directing the impromptu element of sonidero which is delivering the saludos requested by audience participants at bailes. The innovative element of cumbia sonidera, however, that adds to the *saludo* informs us that not only the sonido contributes to the sonidero musical style. The *saludo* delivered by the sonido or by the cumbia groups ensures multiple voices are included in the sonic waves of sonidero. Overall, cumbia sonidera allows for sonidos, sonidero enthusiasts, record companies, and informal markets to create this subgenre of cumbia and profit from it.

CLOSE READINGS OF MEXICAN MIGRATION

My close readings of multiple cumbias sonideras include five significant songs. The first set consists two versions of the song, “Lo que traje de colombia.” “La cumbia gabacha” and the follow-up version, “Cumbia de la raza” become the focus of the

following close readings. I conclude my close readings by examining, “Baila baila mexicano.” I intend to merge contemporary migration of human bodies with song by studying the lyrics of cumbias sonideras. These songs identify points of solidarity and recognition across Mexican immigrant communities in Mexico and the United States. My reading of the following cultural texts presents a “transnational cultural memory” of cumbia which crosses the U.S.-Mexico border in multiple directions. Patricia Zavella articulates cultural memory as being, “a field of contested meanings associated with trauma.”¹³⁶ Her study of *Los Tigres del Norte*, *Lila Downs*, and *Quetzal* argues that these Mexican bands create transnational archives of feelings where the social positions of the cultural activists also influence the readings of the cultural texts.

Unlike Zavella who interviewed artists, my study solely produces a textual analysis. The cumbias sonideras analyzed in the following pages demonstrate how the cultural memory of migration becomes center stage in sonidero. The cultural memory positions an unequal relationship between Mexico (and Colombia to an extent) with American empire. The artists articulate the larger processes that separate communities and the new ones forged due to migration. Mexican immigrants and their U.S.-born children find themselves on the margins of U.S. society. The marginality occurs because people of Mexican descent find themselves in U.S. soil where their labor is constantly demanded, while nativist discourses push for their deportations. This state of marginality and the horrors of immigrating through the Arizona desert and on top of freight trains have caused immigrants to forge cultural memories through cultural production. For

¹³⁶ Patricia Zavella, *I'm Neither Here nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles with Migration and Poverty* (Durham & London: Duke University, 2011), 191.

example, Los Tigres del Norte paints an obvious picture of blatant discrimination experienced by immigrants with song titles like, “Vivan los mojados.” The cumbias sonideras presented in this chapter also produce a cultural memory influenced by a state of marginality. None of the cumbias studied in this chapter explicitly link immigration with marginality in their message. Words like “mojado” or immigration are not found in these cultural texts. It is the subtle lyrics that stress migration and trauma in these cumbias sonideras that forge a transnational cultural memory.

The departure of immigrants is nostalgically articulated in the lines of these cumbias sonideras even if the only reaction by sonidero enthusiasts’ is to dance. These specific cumbias sonideras have been chosen because they implicitly center immigration in their lyrics. It is the movement of bodies across national borders that allows for the movement of music. The mass movement across borders directs my research of cumbia sonidera to various locations including Mexico, the United States, and I also include Colombia. The first section *Lo que traje de Colombia* offers an entry point to the unique migration of cumbia into Mexico.

Lo que traje de Colombia: The migration of Cumbia from Colombia to Mexico

Scholars agree that Colombia is the birthplace of cumbia. Yet, the music genre has permeated outside its national boundaries to surrounding Latin American countries and most importantly, Mexico. In many respects, cumbia has had multiple migrations to Mexico. Mexican sonidos and performers are responsible for cumbia’s migration to Mexico after these artists traveled to Colombia in the 1950s. Cumbia’s travel to Mexico is synonymous with other Latin American rhythms that were also transplanted in Mexico. Another musical migration of this magnitude similar to cumbia was the importation of

mambo by Perez Prado and Beny Moré. The two Cuban musicians were instrumental with popularizing mambo in Mexico City.

A second significant migration of cumbia to Mexico is attributed to the establishment of marginalized Mexican migrants from the interior of Mexico settling in Monterrey. These migrants hailed from Zacatecas, San Luis Potosi, and Coahuila. The offspring of these migrants used Colombian *vallenato* to adopt a “*colombia*” or “*colombiano*” identity.¹³⁷ This adoption of *colombiano* has not been celebrated by all Monterrey residents. Monterrey society vilifies *Colombias* to be social degenerates.¹³⁸ *Colombias* have responded by using their musical identity to cope with marginalization in Monterrey. Monterrey’s *Colombias* eventually gained international recognition with Latin Grammy nominee Celso Piña’s rendition of “Cumbia sobre el río.” He covers traditional Colombian cumbia like Anicieto Molina’s “Cumbia sampuesana.” Piña was born in Monterrey but identifies with the same cultural codes of *Colombias*.

The cumbia entitled, “Lo que traje de colombia” is a great example how migration of cumbia to Mexico’s northern region signifies a bodily and a music migration. Jorge Meza’s rendition of “lo que traje de Colombia” opens the rhythmic tune by proclaiming “para México” (this one is for Mexico).¹³⁹ Hence, he pays homage to Mexico by offering this cumbia to the poorest people of Monterrey who long have loved Colombian *vallenato*. His version of “lo que traje de Colombia” claims, “este ritmo lo traje de Colombia/para que bailen todita los Colombias” (I brought this rhythm from Colombia/so

¹³⁷ José Juan Olvera Gudiño, “Cumbia in Mexico’s Northeastern Region,” in *Cumbia!: Scenes of a Migrant Latin American Music Genre* ed. by Hector D. Fernandez L’ Hoeste & Pablo Villa (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013), 95-96.

¹³⁸ Arturo Cruz, “Desde Monterrey...pura cumbia colombiana: Entrevista con Celso Piña, creador de la subcultural musical del vallenato” *La Jornada* April 26, 2001.

¹³⁹ Jorge Meza y su Tropicolumbia, 25 exitos de oro. Jorge Meza y su Tropicolumbia 887516036989. 2012.

it can be dance by all Colombias). His cumbia, as proclaimed in the lyrics, is intended for Mexicanos who have taken up a *Colombia* identity even if they are natives of Nuevo Leon. We learn from the song title, Meza's song is something he brought from Colombia for migrants. Meza's rendition of "Lo que traje de Colombia" speaks to a larger migration process where Mexicanos have created a *Colombia* identity tied to cumbia after migrating from rural Central Mexico. Whether a Colombian migrant or Monterrey-native *Colombia*, cumbia speaks to the reality of Monterrey's marginalized sectors. Cumbia's migration to northern Mexico ironically aided Monterrey natives subscribe to a cosmopolitan identity and has altered Mexico's cultural landscape.

Mariachi Juvenil de Mexico broadens the migratory path with their rendition of "Lo que traje de Colombia."¹⁴⁰ The common ground for both cumbias is the understanding that this "ritmo" (rhythm) was brought from Colombia. Mariachi Juvenil's interpretation of this song directs the travel of cumbia to Mexico for a Mexican audience. The Mexican group substitutes Jorge Meza's lyrics of "para que los bailen toditas los Colombias" to "pa que lo bailen lo el fiesta mexicana" (so it [the cumbia] can be dance at Mexican fiestas). Jorge Meza speaks directly to the *Colombias* of Monterrey. The new lyrics imagine the song for a larger Mexican audience on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The new lyrics imagine a Mexico that gives equal respect to cumbia as to Mariachi music. Mariachi Juvenil de Mexico sings, "Los mariachi son musica mexicana," (Mariachi [music] is Mexican music), followed by "ahora tocan musica colombiana" (now they sing Colombian music). Mariachi Juvenil de Mexico's version of "lo que traje

¹⁴⁰ Mariachi Juevenil de Mexico, *Cumbias Bailables con Mariachi*. Antoine Music. 2011.

de Colombia” stresses cumbia to be born in Colombia. Like Meza, Mariachi Juvenil de Mexico recognizes cumbia’s transnational connection between Mexico and Colombia. The two songs even acknowledge that cumbia has arrived to Mexico. Mexican immigrants, however, are responsible for crossing cumbia into Greater Mexico. It may arrive in Mexico City, Monterrey, or New York City. The treacherous migration could possibly be an undocumented Mexican migrant finding his way to the United States or settling in the colonias of Monterrey where Mexicanos have adopted Colombian aesthetics to resist discrimination. In the next section, I expand my close readings of cumbia sonidera with a series of “Cumbia gabacha” songs. The series of “Cumbia gabacha” songs will also prove that cumbia sonidera articulates the Mexican migration experience in newer ways.

ALBERTO PEDRAZA Y LA CUMBIA GABACHA

This essay was inspired by the song “Cumbia gabacha” performed by *Alberto Pedraza con su Ritmo y Sabor*.¹⁴¹ Alberto Pedraza proclaims to be “el rey de la (the king of) cumbia sonidera.” The group is originally from Mexico City but their music stresses Colombian cumbia features. *Alberto Pedraza con su Ritmo y Sabor* has traveled to Mexico, Latin America, and la Union Americana (United States) to perform their most popular cumbias sonideras. It is in the *la Union Americana* or United States where sonidero becomes important because we can now speak of Mexican communities through music.

The chapter title privileges the song title, “La cumbia gabacha” because it centers the United States as the *gabacha*; the metropole which attracts Mexican migrants in

¹⁴¹ Alberto Pedraza con su Ritmo y Sabor, *Oro Puro: 20 Exitos*. Titanio Records DGSO 60804. 2007.

search of economic survival. The term *gabacha* allows for Alberto Pedraza to seek solidarity with migrants whom have been displaced from Mexico. Thus, a close reading “La cumbia gabacha” is crucial to understanding how Mexican migrants center their own voice in cultural production in and outside la gabacha. The word “gabacha” has several meanings. One meaning is a derogatory word for White American(s). The second definition of “gabacha” is the name given to the United States in its juxtaposition to Mexico and Latin America. Both definitions find commonality describing the unequal relationship between Mexico and the United States. La gabacha in reference to the song is directly linked to Mexican and Latin American immigrants who constitute the Latino immigrants residing in the Diaspora. The naming of the song “La cumbia gabacha” reinforces Hector Fernandez L’Hoeste’s claim that, “Cumbia...traveled well...” The starting point for La cumbia gabacha is Mexico, where this music genre is already in a Diaspora. Cumbia continues its migration to la gabacha by way of Mexican immigrants. This migration signifies a mass movement across borders responding to labor shortages. The multiple Diasporas of cumbia identify the migration of the genre but also of the human bodies enjoying cumbia.

There are two songs that constitute what we know as “La cumbia gabacha.” “La cumbia gabacha” is the more popular song of the two versions. The second song with the same concept is titled, “La cumbia de la raza.”¹⁴² Both songs are prime examples how popular culture is used to map Mexican communities in the United States. The following lyrics explicate this phenomenon:

Quiero cantarles la cumbia a los estados unidos.
I want to sing a cumbia to the United States.

¹⁴² Alberto Pedraza con su Ritmo y Sabor, *Oro Puro: 20 Exitos*. Titanio Records DGSO 60804. 2007.

Porque la cumbia la bailan, la bailan con los sonidos
Cumbia is danced, it's dance with los sonidos

La baile alla en Chicago, la bailan en Nueva York, la bailan allá en Atlanta, en Los Angeles, California!

They [Mexicans] dance [cumbia] in Chicago, they dance it in New York, they dance in Atlanta, in Los Angeles, California.¹⁴³

Cuando la gente se junta, se junta para bailar...recordando las tardías del Distrito Federal.

When people come together, they come together to dance, reminiscing on the evenings of the Distrito Federal, Mexico City.

In the “cumbia gabacha,” the more widely circulated version, Alberto Pedraza begins the song by stating “Quiero cantarles la cumbia a los estados unidos” (I want to sing a cumbia to the United States).¹⁴⁴ In this statement, Pedraza is targeting his audience. He knows cumbia is danced in Colombia, Mexico and other parts of Latin America. However, he recognizes the popularity it has received in the U.S. primarily by Mexicans residing in the diaspora. I argue throughout this chapter that cumbia sonidera locates newer ways of articulating the Mexican migration experience. One way to approach this matter, I believe, is to examine the cities mentioned by Pedraza to highlight the places that Mexicans occupy due to labor needs. The lyrics of “La cumbia gabacha” pinpoint Mexican communities, when Alberto proclaims, “Se baila en Chicago, la bailan en Nueva York, la bailan allá en Atlanta, en Los Angeles, California!” (They [Mexicans] dance in Chicago, they dance it in New York, they dance in Atlanta, in Los Angeles, California).¹⁴⁵ Pedraza’s choice of listing cities like Chicago, New York, Atlanta, and Los Angeles are all very important to understanding where Mexicans reside in the U.S.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Places like Chicago and Los Angeles have established Mexican communities. Atlanta's Mexican community, like Alabama and Louisiana, which are all located in the South are seldom discussed. New York's Mexican community is an emerging one but, nonetheless, also has historical roots.

Alberto Pedraza also strengthens our knowledge that the sonidero movement is spreading throughout this country. In "La cumbia gabacha" He states, "la cumbia la bailan, la bailan con los sonidos" (Cumbia is danced, it's dance with los sonidos]. The presence of sonidos in Chicago, New York, California allows for this cultural product to be performed, enjoyed, and circulated. Pedraza also informs that the sonido's job is to disseminate the latest and more popular cumbias sonideras to Mexican immigrants attending the dances in the U.S. The sonidos become the messengers of local popular culture to Mexican communities in the United States. This transmission of popular culture by the sonidos translates for the dance participants what Juan Flores describes as, "'moments of freedom,' specific local plays of power and flashes of collective imagination."¹⁴⁶ These moments of freedom offered by Pedraza's songs demonstrate how cumbia's diaspora is utilized as a marker of a prominent Mexican presence in many parts of the U.S.

We know "La cumbia gabacha" is referring to the United States because in the middle of the song he sings "Cuando la gente se junta, se junta para bailar...recordando las tardiadas de el Distrito Federal" (When people come together, they come together to dance, reminiscing on the evenings of the Distrito Federal, Mexico City). This part of the song reminds listeners that sonidero originated in Mexico City. Sonidero enthusiasts

¹⁴⁶ Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University, 2000), 17.

in the United States are left with the option of recreating these spaces in order to remember them. They remember how they came together to dance and now; they organize dances in many parts of the U.S. Many migrants are left to “remember” because they now permanently settled in the U.S.

The “Cumbia de la raza” is very similar in layout to “La cumbia gabacha” where it references various U.S. cities. It lists many locations in the United States where cumbia is danced in similar fashion to “la cumbia gabacha.” In this song, Pedraza claims that cumbia is danced “in Miami, Philadelphia, San Diego, in the State of Texas, Las Vegas, and San Francisco. He later adds that is it danced in Sacramento. Right after he mentions Sacramento, he proclaims, “Le pone mucho sabor”. (They add a lot of flavor) referring to cumbia. Alberto Pedraza recognizes that Mexicans in the United States are simultaneously contributing and altering the sonidero movement. People invested in sonidero throughout the U.S. are new and old sonidos; they are people creating dance groups, making new dance routines, organizing festivals and spaces for which to dance. Cumbias heard in Mexico are almost immediately heard in the United States with the help of sonidos.

The “Cumbia de la raza” reinforces a Diaspora when Alberto Pedraza proclaims solidarity with Mexicanos and to an extent, Latinos in the U.S. He strongly states, “A todos nuestro hermanos que radican por allá, les regalo esta cumbia pa que bailar sin parar” (To all our brothers [and I will add, our sisters as well] who reside over there [the U.S.], I give you this cumbia so you all can dance nonstop). These lyrics demonstrate Pedraza is knowledgeable of current immigration issues in the North American country. Undocumented and documented immigrants have suffered immensely by the U.S.-

Mexico border. His use of cumbia and the politics of “allá” serve as a coping strategy for undocumented Mexicans who reside in the U.S. and have no chance of returning to their country of origin. The lyrics found in the “Cumbia de la raza” reinforce Pedraza’s desire to formulate solidarity with migrants through song and dance.

BAILA BAILA MEXICANO Y LA SUERTE SONIDERA

Similar to Pedraza’s series of cumbias sonideras, “Baila baila mexicano” archives Mexican migration through song and dance. “Baila baila mexicano” performed by La Suerte Sonidera¹⁴⁷ is a cumbia sonidera describing the migration journey of a regional Mexican group of people from the state of Puebla to New York. Robert Smith’s ethnographic study *Mexican New York* highlights how gender and generational dynamics impact transnational everyday practices of “Ticuanis” immigrants.¹⁴⁸ The transnational migrant circuits created by Ticuanis in Smith’s study rely on Mexican politics and culture to survive racial hostility in New York. Mexican New Yorkers use sonidero to form transnational cultural spaces to reaffirm their Mexicanidad. Cumbias sonideras also aid in the construction of transnationalism for Poblanos in New York. The following lyrics present how “Baila baila mexicano” formulates a transnational map of memory linking Puebla, Mexico to New York City.

Andres Contreras
Y la suerte sonidera

Venga ese sabor
Venga ese sabor

OOOOOOOOOOOOOYYYYeeeeeee

¹⁴⁷ Grupo La Suerte Sonidera *El Inicio de mi Historia* Internet release, CD 53.
<http://www.somossonideros.com/2010/08/suerte-sonidera.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Robert C. Smith, *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

Ahora...

De Puebla
Mi linda Puebla

Hasta la union americana

La ruta del sabor
Dice, dice

De Puebla a Nueva York
La Ruta del Sabor”

La suerte sonidera
Quien canta esta cancion

Al ritmo del tambor
Hoy vas a bailar

Esta rica cumbia
No mas pa no olvidar

Recuerdos de mi Puebla
Lleno de sabor
Hoy que yo me encuentro
Lejos de mi nacion

Baila, Baila Mexicano
Baila, Baila con sabor

Baila, Baila con la suerte sonidera
De corazon....

Ahora
Tambores, tambores, tambores bores bores bores

Sabor, Sabor

From Puebla to New York
The route with much flavor.

George Lipsitz brilliantly concludes his analysis on banda with a correlation
between anti-immigrant feelings and “Home is Where the Hatred is” by Gil Scott-Heron.

He argues, “[that] no one [immigrants and natives alike] can feel at home, because the hatred is everywhere.”¹⁴⁹ While many songs depict an immigration experience full of nostalgia and trauma, artists like La Suerte Sonidera immediately present an optimistic point of view of migratory patterns through their cumbia sonidera that relies on memory. The lead singer exclaims that cumbia reminds him of his Puebla with the lyrics, “recuerdos de mi puebla, lleno de sabor” The use of “mi puebla” (my Puebla) forges a transnational cultural memory where La Suerte Sonidera recovers their home. Puebla is home. They stress that Puebla is full of *sabor* (flavor). Sabor signifies pleasure, and enjoyment. Rather than embracing New York, La Suerte Sonidera longs for Puebla because their home has *sabor*. La Suerte Sonidera follows with the lyrics “cuando yo me encuentro, lejos de mi nación” (far from my country). The separation from home forces Mexicans to rely on memory to create *sabor* in cumbia. “Baila baila mexicano” also centers the act of migrating to find *sabor* with the lyrics, “la ruta del sabor.” Ironically, “la ruta del sabor” might not always be the case for undocumented Mexican immigrants who travel from Puebla to New York. The reality of violence and pain endured by migrants on the journey northward often garnish the most attention but “Baila, baila mexicano” delivers a “ruta del sabor” that Mexicans can dance to.

CONCLUSION

While scholars search for “new” destinations hosting Mexican immigrants, music already points the reader in that direction. The cumbias sonideras presented in this chapter offers a cognitive map of migration. It is a map that merges historically

¹⁴⁹ George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden History of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 77-78.

established Mexican communities in Chicago with emerging ones in Alabama. Each song analyzed in these close readings finds solidarity with Mexicans, whether in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico City, or U.S. cities. These performers understand the U.S.-Mexico border created a painful milieu for immigrants. I conclude that these cumbias sonideras offer new material and symbolic articulations of the migration process for Mexicans. The material articulations are found in the lyrics of cumbias sonideras created specifically for the sonidero community. Sonidos' preference for cumbia sonidera over the older Norteño or Conjunto genres signifies a symbolic departure from the Mexican vaquero aesthetic dominating the literature and music charts. The substitution for cumbia sonidera highlights the historical cosmopolitan identity embodied by natives of Mexico City and Monterrey. The end results create a radical understanding of Mexican migration through song that has immigrants dancing to "La cumbia gabacha" in "la gabacha."

Chapter 3

“Gracias a dios que los bailes me han ayudado”: The Political Economy and Symbolic Networking of Sonidero Amongst Chicagoland Sonidos

The *baile* (dance) ended at two in the morning in a Wisconsin town just north of the Illinois border. “Sonido el Mero Bueno” (loosely translates to The Very Best Sonido), his brother nicknamed Donkey, and I had just finished loading all the equipment back into the truck.¹⁵⁰ Mero Bueno was speaking to one of the nightclub workers. The nightclub owner had just paid Mero Bueno for the night’s performance. I stayed away from this exchange out of respect. My role was to produce an ethnography of Mexican Sonidos not become one. Yet, once I approached el Mero Bueno to alert him the equipment was in the truck, he gave me a crisp \$20 bill. I strongly insisted to him not to compensate me with money; the night’s interview and my opportunity to follow his sonidero performances were fulfilling enough for me. Besides, the night’s pay was one hundred dollars; this was nowhere near enough money to cover travel expenses and food since few people attended the dance. Mero Bueno, however, happily insisted in me taking a share of the night’s winnings. El Mero Bueno explained to the worker who witnessed our exchange—and my reluctance—why he felt compelled to give me a share of the earnings, “él tiene que pagar su tren” (He [referring to me] has to purchase his train ticket home in the morning).

Much of the nightclub layout for this Wisconsin *baile* resembled a standard nightclub. It had a main stage for bands and DJs with a large dance floor. Tables were spread around the floor for patrons to sit. A bar was placed adjacent to the dance area for patrons to consume alcoholic beverages. This particular *baile*, however, failed to draw a

¹⁵⁰ I employ pseudonyms for my informants to protect their identities.

large crowd even on a warm June night. A rival nightclub in the area held a dance that night as well. I was informed by el Mero Bueno that the rival nightclub “se ponía mejor” (He meant the other club was much more entertaining and drew larger crowds).

Approximately, thirty to forty people attended the baile. The majority of people in attendance that night went in groups of three or more. Ages also varied that night because some couples took their entire families including children. I recall witnessing children running around the dance floor while their parents danced. The children gave the *baile* a family-friendly atmosphere.

I had become aware through this ethnographic exchange that I needed to present a self-reflexive analysis of sonidero.¹⁵¹ This moment highlighted how money mediated the social relationships created within the Chicagoland sonidero scene. My relationship with Sonido el Mero Bueno was also altered that night; the very moment money was exchanged for my help at the baile. It was very obvious. I had to acknowledge that my position at the dances was multi-layered. I was a researcher but also a participant. There are occasions in sonidero bailes where money explicitly mediates social relations formed by sonidos and patrons. Two examples of social relations mediated by money are patrons buy alcoholic beverages or pay for a late night meal after the dance. The circulation of money attached to sonidero, and other nightlife cultural styles, pointed me to study how sonidero dances become spaces of leisure for some individuals and spaces of labor for others. Thus, I contend that by studying the political economy of sonidero, we gain knowledge of how money influences social relations between sonidos and the Mexican

¹⁵¹ I used self-reflexive in the anthropological sense where I am cognizant of my position as researcher and my relationship to my research subjects. See, *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited with George Marcus (University of California Press, 1986).

immigrant patrons that frequent the dances. In my case, I too participated in the political economy of sonidero. I was part of el Mero Bueno's team because I followed him to the *bailes* while he simultaneously became my key informants. Perhaps, El Mero Bueno also shared this view. It was probably the driving force behind him giving me \$20 for accompanying him to the Wisconsin baile.

I argue that sonidero *bailes*—similar to other music cultural styles accompanied with the nightlife—become locations of labor for many Mexican immigrants who find themselves at a disadvantage in low-wage jobs. Sonidero forces us to expand our imagination of Mexican migrant labor. While manual work such as landscaping or assembly line work remains significant, I turn attention to the grassroots entertainment industry created by Mexican immigrants as an alternative form of employment that translated into hard cash and symbolic gains. I noticed that sonidos often referred to *tocando* (performing) as “work” and referred to their non-performing weekend nights as them “descansando” (a night off work). I include ethnographic vignettes with Sonido El Mero Bueno accompanied with a secondary informant, Sonido Ambiente Nueva throughout the essay. I introduce the concept of *symbolic networking* in the second half of the essay to work through the social and symbolic structures that mediate interactions between sonidos.

A Political Economy of Sonidero

I define a political economy of sonidero as the creation and consumption of this cultural style that is dependent on the monetary and symbolic accumulations from these dances in addition to the manual labor of Mexican immigrants that translates into disposable income. The political economy of sonidero creates avenues where more than

simple leisure is consumed. It expands our understanding of sonidero to also be a form of labor. The political economy of sonidero highlights the production, consumption, and circulation of labor practices tied to the cultural style that occurs at the dances and in preparation of them. In other words, the dances transform the sonido (the person), bartender, and waitress into laborers rather than consumers. While much of Mexican migration is triggered by transnational economic factors, the nightlife becomes supplemental labor for individuals who might already hold low-wage employment during the week. Gender and employment hierarchies complicate the notion of laborer/consumer within the dance space. For example, female bartenders and male busboys are not allowed to dance while they work the bailes. The sonidos, on the other hand, often leaves the cabina during their breaks to socialize and dance with the female patrons.

I expand on Ronnie Lipschutz's definition of political economy that elucidates the relationship between popular culture and capitalism. A Marxist approach to political economy, according to Lipschutz is concerned with how markets and economies are organized and how power and domination are a result of these economic structures. Lipschutz suggest that critical political economists recognized that "there are no markets without politics."¹⁵² Thus, he argues that markets are thoroughly political institutions that are neither natural nor neutral.¹⁵³ In this sense, Mexican migration is deeply related to politically charged markets. In other words, the majority of Mexican immigrants migrate because significant economic policies have negatively affected their daily lives in

¹⁵² Ronnie Lipschutz, *Political Economy, Capitalism, and Popular Culture*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 3.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 4.

Mexico.¹⁵⁴ Mexican immigrants are also at a disadvantage when they arrive in the U.S. by politically-charged market factors such as low wages and minimum workers' rights. Undocumented workers, thus, rely on official and unofficial means to earning an income. The very economic markets that drive Mexican migration to the U.S. have constructed a milieu where migrants find themselves economically-alienated on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The power of money or political economy also extends to the study of cultural practices and leisure spaces. A political economy framework helps work through the ways Mexicans reap monetary and symbolic gains from *sonidero* in the face of economic hardships.

I briefly discuss the markets and economic forces that are instrumental to conceptualizing the experiences of Mexican migrants such as neoliberalism. These market forces highlight the correlation between labor demands in the U.S. with agricultural restructuring in Mexico and border industrialization initiatives.¹⁵⁵ There are also quotidian market forces to mention such as informal economies and social and kin networks that Mexican immigrants rely on to navigate American society.¹⁵⁶ I further expand on a political economy of *sonidero*, by discussing the ways in which

¹⁵⁴ See Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002); David G. Gutierrez, "Globalization, Labor Migration, and the Demographic Revolution: Ethnic Mexicans in the Late Twentieth Century," In *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States Since 1960*, ed. D.G. Gutierrez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 43-86.

¹⁵⁵ Francisco L. Rivera-Batiz, "Can Border Industries Be a Substitute for Immigration?" *The American Economic Review* 76 (1986): 263-268. A discussion regarding For NAFTA and Mexican immigration, consult Patricia Fernández-Kelly & Douglas S. Massey, "Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-U.S. Migration" *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (2007): 98-118.

¹⁵⁶ For a discussion on the shift Mexican laborers make from Mexican agriculture to urban or U.S. service industry work, see Roger Rouse, "Making Sense of Settlement: Class Transformation, Cultural Struggle, and Transnationalism among Mexican Migrants in the United States," *New York Academy of Sciences* 645 (1992):25-52.

money, DJ equipment and material items, and immigrant networks become material forces at the dances and in the daily lives of the individuals involved with sonidero.

Economic Structures in Mexico and the Chicagoland Area

Mexican immigrants have migrated to the United States due to multiple historical and contemporary economic forces. Some of the more significant economic forces that have intensified Mexican immigration to the United States include the 1910 Mexican Revolution, major steel and railroad industries, the Bracero Program, and more contemporarily, the North American Free Trade Agreement. Labor shortages in the Midwest accelerated Mexican immigration as early as the 1900s to cities including Detroit, St. Paul, Chicago, Kansas City, and Gary.¹⁵⁷ Current Mexican immigration to U.S. cities, towns, and suburbs has been impacted as a result of free trade, while at the same time; U.S. cities concurrently experienced white flight and deindustrialization.¹⁵⁸ Chicago, according to Doussard, Peck, and Theodore, has gone through intense deindustrialization during the eighties and a “retrodeindustrialization phase” in 2001-2002 where the city saw layoffs at the rate of one in every seven factory workers.¹⁵⁹ In the case of Latinos in Chicago and the Chicagoland area, Betancur, Cordova, and de los Angeles Torres concludes that in the early 1990s Latinos had gone from bad to worse in

¹⁵⁷ See Chapter 1 of this thesis for an in-depth review of literature tied to Mexicans in the Midwest.

¹⁵⁸ For a discussion on deindustrialization, see Barry Bluestone & Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1984); For a conversation on white flight, see Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹⁵⁹ Marc Doussard, Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore, “After Deindustrialization: Uneven Growth and Economic Inequality in “Postindustrial” Chicago” *Economic Geography* 85 (2009): 187.

the city's restructured economy due to discrimination and structured segmentation.¹⁶⁰

Immigration raids have also become a contributing factor to the labor alienation throughout the Chicagoland area post-9/11. Elvira Arellano made national headlines when she sought sanctuary in a Chicago church for one year after she refused to surrender to immigration authorities for deportation.¹⁶¹ She was under deportation when immigration authorities apprehended her while working at O'Hare International Airport in 2002. Arellano, however, symbolized the cases of thousands of Latino immigrants who found themselves in immigration limbo after arriving to labor in Chicago's industries.

The Midwestern region of the United States has been a destination for many Mexican immigrants seeking work.¹⁶² However, wages in the Midwest have varied from high paying industrial work to minimum-wage factory labor. Mexicans and other Latinos in Chicago have now filled the ranks of the service sector. According to Betancur et al.:

“As manufacturing opportunities decreased, many Latinos have been absorbed into low-paying jobs as busboys and dishwashers in restaurants, as maids and cleaners in hotels, as security guards, messengers, maintenance workers, gardeners, and similar low-end jobs in the service industry.”¹⁶³

Migrants have also been met with high rents and expensive food prices. To make matters worse, Latinos have felt a difficult economic backlash with the 2008 recession.

According to the Pew Hispanic Research Center, Hispanics lost 66% of their wealth

¹⁶⁰ John J. Betancur, Teresa Cordova, & Maria de los Angeles Torres, “Economic Restructuring and the Process of Incorporation of Latinos Into the Chicago Economy,” in *Latinos in a Changing U.S. Economy: Comparative Perspectives on Growing Inequality*, (Newbury: Sage Publications, 1993), 133.

¹⁶¹ Alejandro Escalona, “Supporters reach crossroads,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 2007. Retrieved from http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-08-26/news/0708250241_1_elvira-arellano-immigration-reform-movement-arrest-and-deportation.

¹⁶² Ann V. Millard, and Jorge Chapa, *Apple Pie & Enchiladas: Latino Newcomers in the Rural Midwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press 2004).

¹⁶³ John J. Betancur, Teresa Cordova, & Maria de los Angeles Torres, “Economic Restructuring and the Process of Incorporation of Latinos Into the Chicago Economy,” in *Latinos in a Changing U.S. Economy*, 127.

compared to only 16% for whites due to the housing market collapse of 2006 and the 2007, 2008 recession.¹⁶⁴ A significant number of Latino homes went into foreclosure in the Chicago and the Cook County region that encompasses surrounding towns like Cicero and Melrose Park.¹⁶⁵

The financial meltdown intensified poverty in Chicago's Mexican neighborhoods and throughout the Chicagoland in 2008. The loss of wealth widened the economic gap even further. Mexicans and Latinos were already on the margins of the economic ladder of Chicago. The uneven distribution of finances and wages forced many Mexicans to seek other ways to make money. Rebeca Raijman points out those Mexican immigrants in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood denied entry into the formal economy due to immigration status or education participate in the informal economy.¹⁶⁶ Informal economies including child caring, street vending and auto repair became significant in supplementing income for many of Chicago's Mexican immigrant residents.

Mixing Culture with Money

Many cultural studies scholars devote their attention to cultural politics and resistance in order to situate how hierarchies of race, sex, gender, and class place subjects in marginal positions. More specifically to U.S. Latinos, Mary Romero and Michelle Habell-Pallán highlight that Latino popular culture is intertwined with histories of

¹⁶⁴ Rakesh Kochhar et al., "Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics," *Pew Research Center*, July 26, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26/wealth-gaps-rise-to-record-highs-between-whites-blacks-hispanics/>.

¹⁶⁵ Ruben Feliciano, "Latinos and the Foreclosure Crisis: Its Impact in Cook County, Illinois," A Report by the *Latino Policy Forum*, February 9, 2010.

¹⁶⁶ Rebeca Raijman, "Mexican Immigrants and Informal Self-Employment in Chicago" *Human Organization* 60 (2001): 47–55.

colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and class domination.¹⁶⁷ More specific to Chicanos, Angie Chabram-Dernersesian locates the political and social climate in the United States that systematically discriminated against Chicanos and Mexicans when discussing the formation of Chicano cultural studies.¹⁶⁸ Hence, the marginal position held by Chicanos and recent Mexican immigrant has been central to cultural studies.

Tensions arise in the debates in the study of popular culture because orthodox political economists argue that cultural studies ignore economics and do not accurately understand structural inequality.¹⁶⁹ Lawrence Grossberg argues the contrary that cultural studies never rejected political economy when studying power and resistance.¹⁷⁰ Robin Kelley and Lilia Fernandez brilliantly center political economy in their studies of working people of color and popular culture. Robin Kelley's foundational work, *YO Mama's Disfunktional* and Lilia Fernandez's Master's study on house music in Chicago both examine how urban youth of color throughout the 1980s and 1990s were alienated by the U.S. economy and public education. Kelley examines how Black youth use rap or sports as a means to make a living, while Fernandez studied high school-aged Latino DJs who primarily played house music and made money through performances at clubs and daytime parties.¹⁷¹ Both scholars have theorized how people of color turn "play" into money or as Kelley describes, as "the pursuit of leisure, pleasure, and creative expression

¹⁶⁷ Mary Romero and Michelle Habell-Pallán, "Introduction" in *Latino/a Popular Culture*, ed. Michelle Habell-Pallán and Mary Romero (New York & London: New York University Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁶⁸ Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, "Introduction to Part One" In *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 1-25.

¹⁶⁹ See Nicholas Garnham, "Political Economy and Cultural Studies: Reconciliation or Divorce?" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12 (1) 62-71.

¹⁷⁰ Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy: Is Anybody Tired with this Debate?" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12 (1) 72-81.

¹⁷¹ Robin Kelley, *YO Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); Lilia Fernandez, "Latina/o Youth Culture, House Music, and the Making of Urban Space" (Master's Thesis, University of California, San Diego, 2002), 101.

is *labor*”.¹⁷² These unique cultural studies scholars suggest that expressive culture has an intimate relationship with money.

Chicana/o Cultural Studies have also treated money as an important object in their study of popular culture. George Lipsitz argues that an analysis of *quebradita* cannot divorce the transnational economy from the circulation, reception, and consumption of the respective Mexican immigrant cultural form.¹⁷³ Jose Limón notes in his classic ethnography, *Dancing with the Devil*, that *Tejano* patrons in a South Texas *conjunto* (Tex-Mex polka music played with an accordion and bajo sexto) baile engage with the economy created around the nightlife.¹⁷⁴ He discusses how his subjects purchase alcoholic beverages, purchase clothing for the dance, and even need to pay for food after the dance. Martha Chew Sanchez describes Mexican immigrant patrons of the more recent *norteña* music scene spend large amounts of money on their vaquero outfits.¹⁷⁵ These Chicano cultural studies works bring to light an analysis that requires a discussion of money in order to understand popular culture.

The sonidero scene is also tied to an economy that sustains the weekend bailes. Sonidero *bailes* operate on a steady circulation of money in order to properly function. The financial burden is placed on all participants including the sonidos, the nightclub staff, and dance participants. Dance goers spend their hard earned wages in order to enjoy themselves at the baile. Entry prices to bailes range from five to fifty dollars. A couple

¹⁷² Robin Kelley, *YO Mama's Disfunktional!*, 45.

¹⁷³ George Lipsitz, “Home Is Where the Hatred Is: Work, Music, and the Transnational economy”, in *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader* ed. by Angie Chambram-Dernersesian (New York & London, 2006), 309.

¹⁷⁴ José E. Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

¹⁷⁵ Vaquero outfits consist of cowboy botas (boots) and tejanas (hats). The botas alone can cost from \$300-\$2,000 dollars. For a visual look at how much money is spent on vaquero clothing, see Martha I. Chew Sánchez, *Corridos in Migrant Memory* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 148.

must pay double the cover charge at the door. Patrons purchase alcoholic beverages and food—once inside the club—at inflated prices. On some occasions, an independent vender, usually a woman sells flowers. CDs and/or DVDs of the recorded sonidero performance can run as high as twenty dollars an item. The recorded CDs and DVDs go for sale immediately following the dance. Individuals can easily spend anywhere from fifty to two hundred dollars in one night at a sonidero dance. Yet, although the production and consumption of sonidero bailes comes with a steep price; the cover charge must spread a long way. Promoters must pay the guest sonido(s) and/or cumbia band's honorarium and travel cost, security, publicity costs, the promoter's helpers, and the nightclub owner's cut for renting out their location. Surplus money that remains after everyone gets paid is the promoter's winnings. Every single person involved in various capacities within the sonidero movement is affected economically.

Material items purchased by sonidos and sonidero enthusiast also become central to understanding the political economy of sonidero. The sonidos develop a sense of belonging with the incorporation of their logo on clothing and jackets. Sonidos purchase jackets and/or t-shirts with their stage name. The *chavos* also wear the t-shirts and jackets that bear the sonido's logo to showcase what sonido team they belong to. The more experienced and financially stable sonido teams will ensure that everyone in the team wears a t-shirt or jacket. *Clubs de baile* (dance groups) that attend the dances together also create fashionable t-shirts to wear at dances to distinguish themselves from other groups. On some occasions, dance groups wear color-coded outfits rather than bearing the group's name on t-shirts. Dance participants (who do not affiliate with a sonido or club de baile) also engage in a fashion aesthetic by wearing their trendiest clothes to the

nightclubs. These clothing fashions include flashy buttons up shirts or baggy jeans with a heavy sweater for men. Ladies wear skin tight mini-skirts and high heels. The fashions tied to sonidero and nightclub culture hints that the political economy of this particular musical style begins even before arriving to the dance. The clothing purchases, similar to the DJ equipment, are the material goods that add to the cost of attending sonidero *bailes*.

The concern with fashion and its connection to a political economy of sonidero became very clear while conducting research one night. I recall arriving to El Mero Bueno's home in preparation for the Wisconsin dance (the same night El Mero Bueno paid me \$20 dollars) after traveling for seven hours on a bus. El Mero Bueno immediately told me the night's plans which included driving over one hundred miles to reach the nightclub. El Mero Bueno noticed I needed to freshen up for the dance. I had a change of clothes in my schoolbag. El Mero Bueno pointed me to his bedroom dresser and said, "Mira allí está la plancha para que planches tu ropa y ay puedes agarrar perfume," (There's the iron for you to press your clothes and help yourself to some cologne). I wanted to be less of a burden to El Mero Bueno, so I insisted my clothes did not need ironing. He responded to my rejection, "no manches, plancha tu ropa," (Don't screw around, and iron your clothes!). El Mero Bueno's constantly emphasized that I looked my best on every occasion I accompanied him to a baile. His stage presence was dependent on his entire team (including me) dressing appropriate for the nightlife. In the sonidero scene, sonidos are socially judged by their colleagues on everything from the amount of sound system a sonido supplies to their material belongings. If a sonido or someone from his team appears to be *muy tirado* (lacking neatly pressed or clean clothes), then a sonido is viewed as having a poor stage presentation. El Mero Bueno

needed me to properly dress to nightclub standards because my personal appearance could have also impacted his reputation as a sonido (since I was viewed by the dance participants as El Mero Bueno's stage hand for the dance not as a researcher). Therefore, El Mero Bueno confidently instructed me to press my clothes so his stage presence would not be jeopardized.

Sonidos at work

I want return our focus back to the introductory vignette to emphasize that Mexican sonidos can find positive results from performing at bailes. I am inspired by Robin Kelly's concept of "putting culture to work" to explicate the financial gains of sonidero. The sonidos, too, put culture to work similar to Black youth who use their artistic skills for employment. A fundamental difference between Chicagoland sonidos and the Black youth discussed in Kelly's study is Kelly's youth hope to make a living based off the income from professional sports or entertainment. The Chicagoland sonidos differ because the money made from performing cannot support all their living expenses.¹⁷⁶ Instead, the Mexican sonidos seek supplemental income from sonidero performances. El Mero Bueno reinforced this point when he stated, "Gracias a dios que los bailes me han ayudado". Sonido el Mero Bueno's word were expressed in the context that performing at bailes were aiding in bringing more income to his household during a period when his job had reduced his work hours from forty to thirty per week.

My experience that evening at this Wisconsin nightclub magnified my understanding on how money mediates power relationships between patrons and workers. First, the Mexican patrons must have expendable income after laboring in their respective

¹⁷⁶ Famous sonidos from Mexico can make a living off performances but they are a small pool of sonidos who enjoy this level of economic success.

jobs to attend these dances. The nightclub owner and promoter (sometimes the promoter is the sonidero) depend on bodies to enter the dance in order to make a profit. The bartenders rely on the patrons to purchase alcohol in hopes of collecting tips for their services. The worker mentioned earlier in the vignette that assisted with stocking beer and engineering the club's sound system also relied on the dance to make supplemental income. There was even a taco truck outside waiting for patrons to leave the club in hopes of making money off hungry customers. The workers and performers were anticipating a big night with many sonidero enthusiasts to crowd the club so everyone could get paid after the night's work. Unfortunately, the dance did not attract that big crowd, and the earnings were low after being divided by all the staff. The dance participants, regardless of how little the payout was for the staff and the sonidos, still spent money. The dance participant exchanged their money for leisure and the sonidos and staff exchange their labor for income. These multiple exchanges that took place that night signify how important political economy is to the nightlife because every involved party anticipated a positive gain by offering their earned income or labor.

The dance where el Mero Bueno and his brother performed is located in a Wisconsin town just north of Illinois. It was near Rockford, IL which belongs to the Chicagoland area. The town housed several major companies such as Hormel and Doritos. The companies' plants can be seen from the freeway. Portions of the towns had large farmland holdings. This town had become a hub for attracting Latino immigrant labor. A small Mexican community has flourished in this town along with an entrepreneur group of immigrants starting businesses such as grocery stores and taquerias, along with nightclubs. I even met people that night that crossed the state line to

attend the dance.

El Mero Bueno and his brother Donkey both hoped to make more than \$100 dollars that night to at least cover the travel costs, food, and beer consumption. Things did not play out this way. This is not a typical night for the sonido. There is money to be made in these dances which can range from \$300-\$2,000 in one event. One factor that may determine the night's pay has much to do with who is promoting the baile. Cathy Ragland notes that the sonidos tend to promote the dances themselves.¹⁷⁷ This choice helps sonidos enjoy larger profits rather than hiring someone to promote the event and having to divide the earnings. The sonido, if he is his own promoter and the only sonido on the bill will see larger revenue for his labor. The majority of sonidero dances tend to have more than one sonido which translates to divided profits. El Mero Bueno and Donkey, on this one particular night knew they were sharing the night's *ganancias* with another sonido. El Mero Bueno had mentioned before we arrived to the dance hall that he was sharing the night with another performer.

On some nights, sonidos forfeit sonidero performances to DJ weddings, quinceñeras, neighborhood block parties, and other private events. Sonidos can earn anywhere from \$600 to \$1500 dollars for private parties depending on the amount of sound equipment used and the driving distance to the party. My first experience conducting research with El Mero Bueno took place while he "worked" his neighbors' wedding in Cicero, IL. El Mero Bueno and his crew were hired to work the wedding because his neighbors knew they were DJs. Choosing el Mero Bueno as their DJ was a direct result of these two families living next door to each other and the newlyweds

¹⁷⁷ Cathy Ragland, "Mexican Deejays and the Transnational Space of Youth Dances in New York and New Jersey," *Ethnomusicology*, 47 (2003): 342.

trusting El Mero Bueno had a versatile music selection. El Mero Bueno's command of the English and Spanish language also assisted in securing such a performance because he was expected to captivate the wedding guests' attention through the microphone and the music. The groom and bride were both of Puerto Rican descent, and do not attend sonidero dances.¹⁷⁸ The implicit rule of the night was to avoid playing cumbia (sonidero's staple genre) because the newlyweds preferred Caribbean salsa and American R&B. There were no saludos like the ones delivered at the bailes. Here, El Mero Bueno performed strictly wedding DJ duties such as announcing the first dance. El Mero Bueno's knowledge of Caribbean music genres such as salsa, bachata, merengue along with Chicago dance staples like house music and the "Cha Cha slide" allowed him to acquire this paid performance. DJing his neighbor's wedding translated into an additional source of revenue for el Mero Bueno at the end of the night.

Sonidero-related work is not the main source of income for El Mero Bueno. He and his brother Donkey, who is also his sonido partner, are both immigrants from the state of Oaxaca. They are accompanied in Illinois by various siblings and extended family members. Their migration to Illinois has led them into different labor markets. Donkey works two fast food jobs, which both are crucial to support his family. Sonido el Mero Bueno, on the other hand, works as a truck driver delivering packages for UPS. El Mero Bueno takes pride in his job as one can see with photos of himself in uniform standing next to his UPS truck on Facebook. Donkey also finds pride in his physically-demanding work. There have been several occasions where Donkey insisted I visit him at

¹⁷⁸ I have met Puerto Ricans at sonidero bailes. They are always a small minority. Puerto Rican salseros like Willie Gonzalez, however, perform at sonidero bailes.

his job to try the pizza. These two brothers work twice as hard during the week at their primary jobs and then work more on the weekend at sonidero events.

According to el Mero Bueno, he became a sonido because several friends had encouraged him after they saw his home stereo equipment. He then thought it would be a good idea to organize *un equipo de sonido* (DJ sound system). He then began performing at different bars and clubs. He continued to desire additional sound equipment. El Mero Bueno has mentioned on many occasions that he would spend all his money to buy DJ equipment or speakers. He said to me, “a veces no tengo ni para una hamburguesa (sometimes I don’t even have money to buy a hamburger) but fuck it.” El Mero Bueno constantly told me during conversations how he wanted more speakers and aimed at buying a small trailer to transport his equipment. His DJ rack mixer for example reads at the top “limited edition”. I asked him if it really was limited edition. He said, “yo lo arme así guey.”¹⁷⁹ He placed the “limited edition” placard on his new mixer to make other sonidos believe his equipment was an exclusive line. The installation of the placard could also be viewed by clients as El Mero Bueno owning the best sound equipment and increase his own reputation among sonidero fans. El Mero Bueno’s intense desire for more equipment continued to grow as we got to know each other more. He even had me contact people on craigslist in order to purchase more DJ equipment. The sonido logic behind constantly accumulating the most state of the art sound equipment is to outperform other sonidos. The sonido with the better sounding quality DJ gear has a more appealing stage presence. Sonido el Mero Bueno mirrored many sonidos who too had the desire to obtain large quantities of speakers and amplifiers (see figure 2). Those who hold

¹⁷⁹ Conversation with El Mero Bueno, Fall, 2010.

a vast collection of DJ gear hold respect in the sonidero world because they have the capacity to put on larger dances or outdoor dances. Sonidos whom hold the minimum sound equipment in addition to smaller networks have to rely on those with bigger reputations and lots of equipment in order to get performances. The bigger the dance or the number of performances a sonido receives is directly linked to how much sound equipment a sonido can accumulate. A sonido's presence is not solely determine by how many speakers he takes to a baile or who has the best processed voice to delivers saludos. The bailes also consists of many social forces that influence the political economy of sonidero. The following section studies interactions between sonidos through a concept I call *symbolic networking*. Symbolic networking goes beyond the monetary benefits by including how sonidos map out their own social world along the lines of alliances and hierarchies.

Symbolic Networking and Chicagoland Sonidos

The train left me a block away from Sonido el Mero Bueno's house in a Chicagoland suburb thirty minutes outside the city. It was near eleven in the morning. He invited me into his home to eat and watch a movie with his wife and family while we waited for Sonido Ambiente Nueva. Sonido Ambiente Nueva collaborated with el Mero Bueno that night on a sonidero performance in a Central Illinois college town. Ambiente Nueva brought his mid-size trailer (about ten feet high) to load all the equipment. Once everyone had reached el Mero Bueno's home, the guys began to load Ambiente Nueva's trailer with enormous speakers and subwoofers. Every soul helping in the loading efforts was a man. The women were either inside the house or waiting in the car. I stayed inside watching a movie with el Mero Bueno's brother-in-law because no one had informed me

about Ambiente Nueva's arrival. Shortly after, I realized I should go help with the loading. Immediately, Ambiente Nueva said *vacilando* (jokingly), "oh mi chavo, no sabía que aquí estabas. Ven a ayudarnos" (what up my son, I had no clue you were here. Come and help up).¹⁸⁰ The statement was both a request for assistance but also a sarcastic implication to get my lazy self to work.

The banter continued amongst us as we loaded equipment onto the trailer. The equipment for the night's performance belonged to el Mero Bueno and Ambiente Nueva. The two *sonidos* joined forces for this particular dance as they have done on many nights (see figure 3). More importantly, they collaborated together to share the burden of providing their own speakers for the performance because the dance hall had no sound system. Ambiente Nueva had the trailer to transport the sound equipment to the performance two hours away and el Mero Bueno supplied the bulk of the speakers. Once we arrived to the hall where the dance would take place, both el Mero Bueno's and Ambiente Nueva's teams began setting up the speakers and the steel truss structures. Shortly after, both *sonidos* ordered food for all of us before the dance could begin. Each person had something different to gain from this trip. The *sonidos* were going to perform and get paid. Donkey brought his girlfriend and her friend, who just wanted to join the experience. Another young man joined us on the trip because he enjoyed building the stage and setting up the sound system. This young man later becomes one of El Mero Bueno *chavos*. I, on the other hand, went with the hopes of strengthening my research project in exchange with helping build the stage. The partnership between the two *sonidos* also benefited the crews that accompanied them that night, including myself. We

¹⁸⁰ Fieldnote, October, 2011.

were fed, some of us even danced with each other and with those in attendance. El Mero Bueno and Ambiente Nueva were paid for the dance. They eventually split their earnings amongst themselves and with Donkey.

The above vignette highlights how sonidero expands our understanding of benefit. Political economy mostly concerns itself with shifts in labor patterns and the flow of monies and wealth. The essay began in that tradition scrutinizing how monetary and material goods directly mediate relationships among workers and sonideros at the dances. My second assertion in this essay is to situate how political economy examines the indirect and symbolic interactions amongst Chicagoland's Mexican sonidos. I take up this task by scrutinizing how material items such as DJ equipment can also mediate social relationships. I employ the concept of *symbolic networking*, to understand the impact of social relations between sonidos that are mediated through these material goods. *Symbolic networking*, as I define it, is the symbolic benefits, in addition to the material and monetary gains that derive from immigrant networks. These symbolic networks are utilized to assist each other when disadvantaged by local and global economies. Symbolic networking will also highlight the hierarchies formulated in the sonidero social scene. Overall, I employ symbolic networking to situate how social interactions influence how sonidos interact with each other.

There have been many occasions where el Mero Bueno has teamed up with other sonidos to secure gigs. One performance could possibly lead to more gigs for some sonidos after they interact with other club promoters. El Mero Bueno also rents out his speakers or amplifiers to other guys, which becomes extra income for him. On a larger scale, Chicago sonidos also collaborate with individuals in multiple U.S. cities to bring

prominent sonidos from Mexico. Thus, the sonidos creates what Roger Rouse has described as *transnational migrant circuits*.¹⁸¹ The process of bringing sonidos from Mexico to perform in the U.S. can be difficult. U.S.-based sonidos first seek sonidos from Mexico who already have a valid immigration visa to enter the country. The ones who do not have proper permission to enter the U.S. are often overlooked due to the risks involved with crossing the border with a coyote. Bringing a sonido from Mexico regardless of the immigration status requires maintaining communication and ties to business partners in Mexico and the U.S. The Mexico-based sonido will come to the U.S. to tour various U.S. cities. The various sonidos (especially those who live in different U.S. cities) who collaborate to bring a famous sonido from Mexico must all share the burden of costs and logistics. Some of the costs and logistics that accompany such a tour include food, lodging, transportation (while visiting a particular city and between cities), and an honorarium. The sonido networks created locally, nationally, and at transnational heights directly speak to the sort of economy created by this popular musical style. A complex web of friendships and business partnerships assist in the transnational arrangement of sonidos across the U.S.-Mexico border.

The symbolic networking among sonidos also includes family and friends who do not participate in the cultural scene. The following morning after the Wisconsin baile (the same baile I discussed at the beginning of the essay), while hanging out at el Mero Bueno's home, he takes out some CDs to upload onto his computer. He then stated, "estos CDs me los trajeron de México" (these CDs were brought from Mexico).¹⁸² He continued to import the music while he made it clear that he relied on receiving the latest

¹⁸¹ Roger Rouse, "Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism," *Diaspora* 1 (1991) 8-23.

¹⁸² Conversation with El Mero Bueno, June 26, 2009.

cumbia and salsa songs from sonidos based in Mexico. The Mexico-based sonidos, themselves, did not deliver the music. The CDs were sent with family members and friends who had traveled to Mexico. He assured me that more music was on its way. El Mero Bueno also relied on guys who lived in Chicago to sell him music. Many sonidos like the ones who sell music to el Mero Bueno also sell CDs at local flea markets on the weekends. What may appear as a favor on a micro-level becomes a transnational network on a macro-level when El Mero Bueno relies on these favors to acquire the latest Latin rhythms circulating in the sonidero bailes in Mexico. These transnational favors give him an upper hand in the sonidero scene. The transnational movement of people from Chicago to Mexico is greatly beneficial to El Mero Bueno as he continues to build his musical repertoire that in return directly translates to more money.

Juan Garcia and Gabriela Arredondo both discuss how Mexicans who settled in Chicago and surrounding Midwestern cities during the earlier half of the 20th century formed civic and sports organizations, joined mutual aid societies to assist Mexican compatriots during financial downturns.¹⁸³ Anthropologist Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz has recently stressed the reliance that Mexican immigrants living in a Chicagoland suburb have on social networks in order to gain employment.¹⁸⁴ These studies demonstrate how Mexican immigrants create their own social capital when alienated by U.S. labor markets and society. The study of social networks among Chicagoland sonidos emphasizes how material but also symbolic currency is at stake. Sonidos have shown that they cannot act

¹⁸³ Juan Garcia, *Mexicans in the Midwest: 1900-1932*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996); Gabriela Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-1939* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 9-11.

¹⁸⁴ Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz, *Labor and Legality: An Ethnography of a Mexican Immigrant Network* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65-67.

alone. Sonidos consider each other to be *compas* (buddies) and colleagues. A perfect example of fusing friendship with business partnership is El Mero Bueno and Ambiente Nueva. Both sonidos always look to each other for support. They perform at each other's *bailes* and attend each other's family parties. They each have their own set of sonidero networks that are fused together for larger events.

As mentioned above, sonidos rely on networks to borrow sound equipment. However, this DJ equipment must be purchased from retailers before these networks can take shape. Chatteron and Holland have theorized how corporations have begun to penetrate the "new" urban entertainment economy including the nightlife.¹⁸⁵ There is no denying this phenomenon as corporate products are sold at dances such as Miller alcoholic beverages and the immigrants who attend the dances wear brand named clothing purchased at local shopping malls. Scholarship that focuses on the corporate takeover of American life and consumption constantly reminds the intellectual that nearly every human being consumes corporate products. Nightclubs are no different. The DJ equipment used by sonidos is also material culture purchased from retail stores. While sonidos hope nightclubs own a sound system, these performers always provide their own *cabina* (DJ rack mixer) along with their CDs and speaker wires. It is the instances where dance halls or nightclubs do not own their own equipment, that dances become more work for the sonido. Private parties such as weddings will more than likely require sonidos to bring the entire sound system setup. A vast majority of sonidos find themselves renting additional sound equipment for performances. Renting costs can

¹⁸⁵ Chatteron, Paul & Holland, Rober, "Producing Nightlife in the New Urban Entertainment Economy: Corporatization, Branding and Market Segmentation" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27.2 (2003): 361-385.

range from \$250-\$400 dollars.¹⁸⁶ From this demand, an additional business of sound system rentals is created among the sonidos. Sonido Ambiente Nueva once mentioned “la mayoría renta” (almost everyone rents equipment) referring to how sonidos acquire sound equipment for their performances. In the case of el Mero Bueno and Ambiente Nueva, they do not have to rent because each sonido owns extensive DJ equipment and speakers. Not to mention, they both (el Mero Bueno later purchased his own vehicle) own medium-sized trailers to transport large amounts of sound equipment.

The need to rent equipment requires money. Hence, a portion of the money made by sonidos in one night goes to paying for the rented equipment. This money transfers over to another sonido who owns an extensive collection of expensive DJ equipment. Sonido el Mero Bueno, for example, has rented speakers out to many sonidos in the past. On some weekends, he is hired to strictly provide sound equipment and engineer a performance for other sonidos or even for duranguense bands. El Mero Bueno does not have to perform at these functions but yet his sound system is making him extra cash. These business transactions allow for el Mero Bueno to make additional income than simply relying on the money he makes from performing. These transactions are business related but also create networks amongst the sonidos. Rather than relying on DJ stores to rent equipment, sonidos assist each other by supplying one another with equipment for a performances and the other with extra income. DJ rental stores, on the other hand, will charge more than the informal agreements amongst sonidos for equipment. Plus, the DJ stores will likely have sonidos sign liability forms and purchase insurance on equipment while informal networks do not require this kind of red tape.

¹⁸⁶ Conversation with Sonido Ambiente Nueva, July 2013.

The informal renting of sound equipment between sonidos does assist with extra income. However, money does not always have to be the compensation for “renting” equipment or in the following stances, borrowing it. The vignette in this section demonstrates that El Mero Bueno and Ambiente Nueva combined their equipment for the dance to work together rather than rent to each other. This example of symbolic networking, however, does not always guarantee positive results because competing sonidos may find particular collaborations as a threat. These feelings encourage the counterproductive aspects of networks where only a handful of people benefit from it. During a conversation over breakfast, el Mero Bueno summoned a story where one of his sonido friends was missing speaker wires and crucial cables to get his DJ equipment at a performance. There were other sonidos in attendance at the dance with extra speaker wires according to el Mero Bueno. This Sonido, discussed in the story, hoped someone that night would have offered a helping hand. El Mero Bueno then retold his conversation with the guy, “¿oyes guey, que no hay chavos allí que te pueden ayudar?” (Hey dude, is there no one that can help you?).¹⁸⁷ The young man replied, “no guey. Todos se están burlando de mí y no me quieren echar la mano” (no dude. Everyone is ridiculing me and refused to help). El Mero Bueno concluded his story by saying that he drove over to the dance to help his friend. He was infuriated that other sonidos chose to humiliate his friend rather than help out. This vignette demonstrated how el Mero Bueno’s friend was not welcomed by the other sonidos performing that night. Sonido El Mero Bueno showed those sonidos that his friend was not alone. He had a network to rely and did not need those other Mexican sonidos.

¹⁸⁷ Conversation with El Mero Bueno, July, 2009.

In the case of the humiliated sonido, el Mero Bueno assisted him without demanding any monetary compensation. He helped the humiliated sonido to showcase to the others that he is a reliable friend. El Mero Bueno's support showed the ridiculing sonidos that the humiliated one has a network and does not need them. In sonidero, it is important to show that you are not alone and have a network. A sonido's symbolic network also highlights how much support and power he has in the sonidero social scene. Often, the main sonido is the head of the network while his *chavos* follow suite. Dance participants also mark territory at the bailes when they affiliate themselves with certain sonidos. This moment also aided El Mero Bueno as well because it proves that he is a dominant player in the local Chicagoland sonidero scene. The competing sonidos often dislike El Mero Bueno because he works with many pioneer sonidos based in Mexico City. A second reason many Chicagoland sonidos view El Mero Bueno as a threat because he is from Oaxaca and not from Mexico City. El Mero Bueno grew up with cumbia and Latin American rhythms in Oaxaca but did not attend sonideo bailes in Mexico's capital. He started his sonidero career in Chicago as an adult not Mexico. Yet, he already has become an authoritative figure in the Chicagoland sonidero scene. He claims rival sonidos question his legitimacy because he gained the respect from pioneer sonidos very rapidly and enjoys performing at the larger sonidero venues throughout the Chicagoland area.

Hence, the symbolic network can map out the various tensions among the groups at the sonidero dances. The various networks form alliances with different groups but do not get along with others. Your association to a particular sonido network can automatically imply who will and who will not help you. On one particular occasion, I

went to talk to a sonido and ask for his business card. He immediately asked me if I was associated with el Mero Bueno. I replied that yes because I had accompanied el Mero Bueno to many dances. However, my goal that night was to establish relationships with other sonidos as a researcher and maintain an impartial presence within the dance. My affiliation though needed to align with a particular sonido in order for other sonidos to talk to me. El Mero Bueno was my symbolic network. My association to El Mero Bueno allowed me access to other sonidos that night. I probably would have been viewed as an outsider and not trusted by the sonidos if I did not align myself with El Mero Bueno.

These experiences highlight how networks have material results, such as borrowing equipment, but also symbolic ones, such as mapping out hierarchies and alliances among Chicagoland sonidos. The politics of renting as compared to borrowing also play out very different as I have mapped out. If a sonido borrows equipment, then it means he has the owner's trust and respect. The owner of the equipment treats that sonido as someone who is deserving of their full collaboration. On the contrary, if one rents the sound equipment, it may imply that the sonido does not have a strong enough friendship with the owner. Therefore, the owner of the sound system can capitalize by turning this exchange into a business transaction rather than collaboration.

CONCLUSION

The following day after the Wisconsin dance, Sonido el Mero Bueno and I had a long discussion about which sonidos were getting “work”, referring to hired performances at sonidero bailes or quinceñeras. He mentioned how many sonidos were lazy and had poor stage presentations. He then juxtaposed himself as an amazing sonido with many professional qualities and a state-of-the-art sound system, which is why he

always has “work” on the weekends. In closing, I wish to reiterate the importance to study political economy in the tradition of cultural studies scholar Robin Kelley who understood that people of color do “put culture to work”. Dance scholars usually devote their analysis to body movements “on the dance floor”. I shifted my focus in this essay to the labor in preparation for the dance and the labor that took place during the dance that may not always be visible to popular culture scholars. The monetary benefits along with the symbolic networking created in sonidero signify how political economy mediates this cultural styles consumed in nightclubs throughout the U.S. Sonidero is more than mere entertainment for Mexican laborers. It is a site where Mexicans also labor. This labor translates into money and, thus, has positive impacts on the lives of undocumented immigrants. I had come to terms that sonidos mixed popular culture with the fruits of their labor (performing at *bailes*). I did the same as my informants by mixing my study of sonidero with political economy.

Chapter 4

***Yo Voy a Bailar!:* Competing Cultural Citizenships/Shifting the Margins within Midwestern Sonidero Dance Spaces**

Latinos have long struggled to claim legal rights and social belonging in America. Deportation campaigns, denied educational opportunities, and lack of political representation has placed U.S. Latinos in subordinate positions in American society. U.S. Latinos have responded to these inequalities with major protests. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed major strides by Chicanos and Boricua activists fighting for education and political rights. The 1990s witnessed mass mobilizations by Latinos protesting nativist campaigns to rid the country of undocumented immigrants and bilingual education. The current millennium has also become a hotly contested era with Latinos leading the way for immigrant' rights. These mass public protests have become the backbone of U.S. Latinos' fight for social justice.

Latinos also fight other forms of struggles for belonging and rights in the United States. Internal cultural battles also occur in Latino communities across the U.S. in the form of dance. Dance may not seem to hold political implications. Men and women rush to dance halls on their nights off from work to move their bodies carelessly, or so we think! Yet, the dance floor holds many possibilities for political struggle. In the eyes of Chicana/o cultural studies, the dance floor becomes a site where Mexican immigrants assert their right to belong in the U.S. However, conflicts pertaining to issues of regional identity, class, gender and sexuality arises in dance spaces. Members of Chicago's sonidero community experienced alienation in Chicago street festivals. In Minneapolis, individuals force their way into sonidero bailes after experiencing rejection due to cover charges or sexual orientation. These spaces, thus, become prime locations to think

through cultural citizenship during moments of alienation created by working-class Mexicans.

This chapter, *Yo Voy A Bailar*, moves beyond the original definition of cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship, according to Rosaldo and Flores,

“...refers to the rights to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one’s right to belong...”¹⁸⁸

“Yo voy a bailar,” discusses the moments when Mexicans are denied the right to belong and be different within their own community spaces. Rosaldo and Flores mentioned they did witness competition throughout their research on cultural citizenship but chose to focus on the positive outcomes of their study.¹⁸⁹ My study, on the contrary, theorizes the competition in hopes of presenting an accurate portrayal of Mexican community dance spaces. I present ethnographic vignettes collected in two Chicago street festivals. The final vignette is inspired by participant observation collected in a Minneapolis nightclub¹⁹⁰ that housed sonidero bailes. These vignettes fit into the larger discussion of cultural citizenship because they highlight how sonidero itself and its participants compete for belonging and the right to be different within the larger Mexican community.

In many respects, cultural citizenship has also taken to task how scholars theorized the public sphere. In this chapter, I use cultural citizenship as a lens to think through the sonidero dances spaces of Chicago and by comparison, Minneapolis. I have learned throughout my research that cultural citizenship cannot easily be applied to

¹⁸⁸ Renato Rosaldo & William V. Flores, “Identity, Conflict and Evolving Latino Communities: Cultural Citizenship in San Jose,” in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, & Rights*, ed. William V. Flores & Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 57.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 72.

¹⁹⁰ The data on Minneapolis was collected during my participation in a graduate course in the theater department at the University of Minnesota during Spring 2008.

Latino or any other racial/ethnic community due to multiple struggles for equality that occur simultaneously within these communities. While cultural citizenship has assisted scholars to theorize how Latinos fight for inclusion, the theory needs to provide a holistic picture of the internal struggles that take place within Latino communities. I argue that the internal struggles for inclusion have a significant impact in how to think about cultural citizenship. The sonidero dances highlight how cultural citizenship is very complicated. I intend to flesh out the complexities of cultural citizenship by accounting the internal competition in this chapter. I suggest the working theory of “competing cultural citizenships.” Competing cultural citizenships, I define as, the multiple and, often times, hierarchical positions held in racial/ethnic communities that alter how these communities fight for inclusion and claim rights.

Various intellectuals throughout the globe began to complicate the cultural and legal understandings of national citizenship.¹⁹¹ Cultural citizenship goes beyond the legal parameters of citizenry in the United States. It is not limited only to people claiming birthright or naturalized citizenship in a particular country. According to William Flores and Rina Benmayor, various activities and acts constitute communities affirming cultural citizenship. These activities range from claiming public space to asserting one’s identity without fear of racial discrimination.¹⁹² A Latino street festival is one example that describes cultural citizenship. Latino street festivals take place across the U.S., especially during annual Latin American independence celebrations. Latinos use these festivals to

¹⁹¹ One study that exemplifies this discussion is Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁹² William Flores & Rina Benmayor, “Introduction: Constructing Cultural Citizenship” in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, & Rights*, ed. William V. Flores & Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 15.

celebrate their culture, food, and dance in outdoor public settings. The festivals or other Latino cultural spaces give Latinos the opportunity to express their culture in a public setting. Latino cultural spaces also have the power to overshadow particular identities or experiences. I study the moments where friction arises in community dance spaces because they have altered the way I understand cultural citizenship.

Cultural citizenship was advanced by the Latino Cultural Studies working group. The working group created this complex theory to understand how Latinos situate themselves in American communities during times of intense racial and nativist backlashes. Arguing that Latinos have held a subordinate position to the dominant white male subject in the United States, Renato Rosaldo claims, “Undocumented workers deserve to be treated in accord with universal human rights.”¹⁹³ Rosaldo’s project is clearly a highly theoretical venture to contest the racist and nativist attitudes towards Latinos in the United States. Aihwa Ong later problematized Rosaldo’s earlier work on cultural citizenship. According to her reading of Rosaldo’s work, Ong states, “Rosaldo’s concept of cultural citizenship indicates subscription to the very liberal principle of universal equality that he seeks to call into question.”¹⁹⁴ Ong takes Rosaldo’s conception of cultural citizenship to task by claiming that class can become a factor when examining how groups assert their claim to belong. Aihwa Ong reached this conclusion

¹⁹³ Renato Rosaldo, “Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism” in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, & Rights*, ed. William V. Flores & Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 31.

¹⁹⁴ Aihwa Ong, “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States” *Current Anthropology* 37 (1996): 738.

by studying how Asian immigrants with higher incomes have more access to important institutions and civil society.¹⁹⁵

Rosaldo, Flores, Benmayor et al. attempted to present a critical dialogue that positioned Latina/os in the United States on a path to obtaining more cultural and eventually, legal rights. Building on these scholars, I suggest that cultural citizenship must also examine alienation within spaces promoting cultural citizenship. My ethnographic observations of sonidero spaces of two Midwestern cities expand the existing literature on cultural citizenship highlighting the inequalities operating within these communities. Building on Aihwa Ong's interpretation of the theory, this chapter situates cultural citizenship more critically in Latina/o communities. I highlight that cultural citizenship is a process where the "cultural citizens" in this case, Mexican immigrants, construct their own cultural spaces. As in the words of the Marxist British historian, E.P. Thompson, "class itself is not a thing, it is a happening."¹⁹⁶ Thompson's and Ong's working definitions demonstrate that cultural citizenship as "happenings" allows for multiple forces and characters to construct it. Cultural citizenship cannot be viewed as something that happened. It is happening everyday in Latino communities. Happenings allow us to re-theorize cultural citizenship in this chapter to find moments where alienated subjects mediated by power relationships force themselves into the narrative.

Historian Dennis Valdés notes in his book, *Al Norte* that the upward mobility experienced by European immigrants was not extended to Mexicans entering the work

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 737.

¹⁹⁶ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Press, 1966), 939.

force in the Midwestern region of the United States during World War I.¹⁹⁷ Early on, as several scholars have discussed, Mexicans confronted race and class discrimination in work, housing, and schooling. Mexican immigrants and their U.S. born children, currently, are left with this legacy to continue contesting racist experiences. Nearly a million Mexican citizens and U.S. citizens of Mexican descent were deported shortly after the great depression.¹⁹⁸ Proposition 187 in California was intended to refuse any sort of state services to undocumented individuals. It potentially would have forced schools, doctors, and other state employees to report all who did not have proper documentation.¹⁹⁹ These and other historical socio-legal processes shaping concepts of citizenship bring us to the twenty first century. Mexican immigrants and Latinos had to again confront and contest racist, nativist attitudes. In the current era of Mexican/U.S. relations, Congressman Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin has attempted to pass bill HR 4437 which would have made it a crime to be undocumented in the United States. Latinos immigrants accompanied by several European and Asian communities took to the streets in large numbers as early as 2005 to protest this bill. Despite the success of the protest, Mexican and Latino immigrants constantly find themselves fighting to be recognized as citizen subjects in the United States.

In July 2005, almost 50,000 Mexican and Latinos turned out to Chicago's historic Back of the Yards community to protest the wave of anti-immigrant sentiments that would eventually evolve into the Sensenbrenner bill. This moment did not just simply

¹⁹⁷ Dennis Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (University of Texas Press, 1991), 7.

¹⁹⁸ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America*, 208.

¹⁹⁹ Otto Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 67.

spur out of thin air. George Lipsitz notes in his introduction to *Footsteps in the Dark*, “Events that seem to appear in the present from out of nowhere in actuality have a long history behind them.”²⁰⁰ There is a historical Latino community in Chicago that is still burgeoning with recent waves of migration from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central and South America, and various region of the Caribbean. Rudy Acuña argues that there is conservatively more than half a million Mexican and persons of Mexican descent living in Chicago.²⁰¹ Paul S. Taylor’s study, *Mexicans Labor in the United States*, began this influential discussion about Mexican labor migration to Chicago and throughout the country.²⁰² As he notes, labor migration helped to shape neighborhoods like Hull House, South Chicago, and the Stock Yards, (now known as Back of the Yards), as some of the early arriving points for Mexicans in the city.²⁰³ Over the years, Mexicans began moving to new communities within and outside the city limits. The more recognizable areas of Pilsen and La Villita (Little Village) are currently the Mexican communities in Chicago which scholars have shifted their intellectual focus. In this section of the chapter, I wish to direct our attention to the historic community, Back of the Yards, where I locate my first ethnographic vignette to demonstrate how Mexican immigrants challenge and offer new ways for scholars to theorize cultural citizenship through the study of sonidero at a local festival.

Mexicans practicing different levels of citizenship in Chicago are traditionally, and most often understood, through electoral politics and grassroots organizing. But,

²⁰⁰ George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* by George Lipsitz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), viii.

²⁰¹ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 399.

²⁰² Paul S. Taylor, “Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region” in *University of California Publications in Economics*. Vol. 7 no. 1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931), 58.

²⁰³ Ibid, 56.

Mexicans in the city have also contested the hostile landscape in the United States by practicing and reshaping cultural citizenship on the dance floor at neighborhood festivals. Sonidero bailes are frequented by Mexicans throughout the city. This portion of my analysis is informed by the occurrences at an annual Chicago festival held in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in early June 2007. Merida Rua and Lorena Garcia argue in *Processing Latinidad*, “Although festive forms are not an everyday occurrence, [however] these dramatizations depict, in many respects, a Latino Chicago experience...”²⁰⁴ Not only are the members of the community depicting a Latino Chicago, they are claiming space through the festival to a specific neighborhood which holds much historical relevance to Mexican migration.

The festival has been going on for many years now. It is organized by local community leaders and church officials. The Back of the Yards festival consists of Mexican food, artisans, merchants, and performance stages. The three performance stages held an array of musical artists that fell under one of the following categories: (1) folkloric performances [ballet Mexicano, Mariachi] (2) Norteña, Duranguense and (3) Sonidero. The folkloric and the Norteña stages were positioned at opposing ends of the festival located near the two important entrances to the event. The positioning of the Ballet Folklórico and Norteña stages allowed them to attract the larger crowds. As stated earlier, the historical Mexican migration to Chicago stem from the bajío region of Mexico including Guanajuato and Guadalajara. Ballet folklórico and norteña have prevailed dominant in Chicago due to the large migration of Mexicans from this region. The sonidero stage was placed on a side street which garnished less attention. The sonidero

²⁰⁴ Merida Rua & Lorena Garcia, “Processing Latinidad: Mapping Latino Urban Landscapes Through Chicago Ethnic Festivals,” *Latino Studies* 5 (2007): 321.

stage became the stage for other Mexican regionalisms to express their heterogeneous Mexican identities. The performing sonidos gave saludos to Mexico City and the *jarochos* of Veracruz. The cultural milieu constructed at the sonidero stage did not match up with the rest of the festival. However, those in attendance at the sonidero stage made their presence very clear that they belong there, too.

Renato Rosaldo tells us how the public square was perceived as idealistically equal to all. Then he reminds us that this is a romanticized notion of equality because both in Europe and the US, the public square was a site of conflict.²⁰⁵ If the Back of Yards festival were to be read as a public square, it would need to be critically examined as a contested zone for various cultural practices including sonidero. The sonidero stage, however, challenged the perceived cultural citizenry with their presence in a festival whose energies were more focused on the ballet folklórico and nortena dance spaces. I suggest that groups or practices also experience alienation within spaces that are supposed to articulate cultural citizenship. Therefore, I argue sonidero must challenge the hierarchies within a location of cultural citizenship to fully claim space and rights.

La Rueda and Sonidero Spaces

Sonidero's struggle to claim space and rights is articulated in the actions that occur in the dance, one being the dance circle. Cathy Ragland reminds us "The *sonidos* are arranged in a circle around the immense dance floor"²⁰⁶ *Ruedas* or dance circles were popularized in Mexico City during sonidero street festivals. La rueda, which Ragland briefly mentions, is one of many components of sonidero yet to be explored in Latino

²⁰⁵ Renato Rosaldo in "Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism," in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, & Rights*, ed. William V. Flores & Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 32-33.

²⁰⁶ Ragland, "Mediating Two Worlds," 9

dance studies. Sally Sommers claims that, “The [dance] circle is the most important structure in the liminal and spontaneous *communitas* of the club, inscribing the essential interpersonal exchange.”²⁰⁷ The dance circle is created for individuals in pairs or threes to perform their latest dance moves. On some occasions, entire dance groups enter la rueda to execute choreographed dance performances. While dance groups display rehearsed dance moves, couples who enter la rueda use this space to display their best improvised dance moves.

The dance circle was recreated at the Back of the Yards festival. It was occupied by one couple at a time. The circle encouraged many individuals to enter the space to display their dance moves. In his discussion of a new theater, Jacques Ranciere proposes the elimination of passive spectators and transition spectators into performers of a collective activity.”²⁰⁸ Audience participation not spectatorship is important at sonidero spaces when the circle is formed. Audience members create their own ruedas at bailes. Ruedas are created when dance participants clear room on the dance floor by signaling people to move aside. A signal implying that a rueda is in the process of being created includes hand gestures towards nearby crowds to move back. La rueda is enforced once it has taken shape, by help from several friends who hold the crowd back by extending their arms. If a new couple wishes to dance, they must walk around the current dancing couple inside la rueda to signal a switch. The signal to change partners in la rueda is a mutual understanding among dancers that a peaceful transition is about to take place.

²⁰⁷ Sally R. Sommers, “‘C’Mon to My House’: Underground House Dancing” in *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, ed. Julie Malnig (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois, 2009), 297.

²⁰⁸ Jacques Ranciere, “The Emancipated Spectator” *Artforum* (2007):272.

La rueda allowed for the sonidero stage to lay claims that day at the Back of the Yards festival. La rueda materialized a space where participants forcefully constructed a diasporic Mexican identity particular to Mexico City and Southern Mexico by dancing to musical genres most notably found outside the Mexican national borders. Overall, entering la rueda allowed individuals and couples to become cultural citizens of Chicago's sonidero scene and the festival at large.

Barrio Bravo, Sonidero Dance Groups, and the Assertion of Space

The dance circle at the Back of the Yards festivals was mostly occupied by individuals in clubs de baile or dance groups. El rey de la cumbia Sonidera Alberto Pedraza proclaims in his music "Mandando el gran saludo a todo los club de baile." (Sending a big shout out to the all the dance groups). Alberto Pedraza recognizes the importance of the dance groups in sonidero with his shout out. It is important that when we study sonidero we look at how social networks are created by dance groups and why people choose to participate in them.

The most recent discussion of dance groups began with Sydney Hutchinson in her book *From Quebradita to Duranguense*, "Young Chicago dancers have formed duranguense clubs in their schools or neighborhoods."²⁰⁹ The dance groups I have witnessed at sonidero bailes are all of legal age, which makes me imply they are community-based groups that hold no affiliation to an educational institution. The dance groups take on names such as Barrio Bravo, Salsa Brava, Mexico y Sus Estrellas, y Reyes de Amor. Dance groups in the sonidero scene attend bailes together because they are

²⁰⁹ Sydney Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press), 169

invited by the organizers. Flyers for these dances state, “We honorably invite the following dance groups” followed by a list of the invited ones at the very bottom of the page. This invitation contributes to the construction of cultural citizenship because it invites collective groups to participate and claims rights together

A group of dancers attended the sonidero dance with matching T-shirts claiming to belong to a dance group from a Northern Illinois suburb. Another individual at the festival wore a sleeveless T-shirt with the words “Barrio Bravo” spray-painted on the back. Barrio Bravo makes reference to the *Tepito* barrio of Mexico City where many Mexicans lay claims to a “rough neighborhood.” Sonidero has a strong presence in this barrio bravo. This gentleman wore a “Barrio Bravo” shirt to the festival because it simultaneously expressed his origins and membership to the club de baile of the same name. It was clear this gentleman along with the Barrio Bravo dance group asserted their right to be different and claim space even at the marginal sonidero stage.

“La Rueda es para divertirse no para combatir”: Revisiting the Dance Circle and the Politics of Inclusion

The dance circle and the dance groups become legitimate forces for sonidero enthusiasts to affirm cultural citizenship within the Back of the Yards street festival. However, my field research in 2010 forced a reexamination of the politics of inclusion and marginality within sonidero. Rather than simply offer a harmonious portrayal of sonidero where all participants cooperate with each other, I demonstrate in this section how even the sonidero dance circle and dance groups do not form perfect cultural citizenship moments.

On a sunny afternoon in 2010, crowds of people flocked to Chicago’s historic Mexican community of Pilsen to attend the annual *Fiesta del Sol*. The festival included

typical carnival staples such as rollercoaster rides, traditional Mexican foods, vendors, and music. Similar to the Back of the Yards Festival, the Fiesta del Sol had multiple music stages with one giving prominence to traditional Mexican music and even a few cumbia performances. The second stage was the popular House of Sol that strictly enforced performances by house music DJs. The third stage, at the entrance of the festival was designated the sonidero stage for sonidos and cumbia enthusiasts. While the Fiesta del Sol's sonidero stage was located at the entrance, it was separated from the entire festival because the street located between the sonidero stage and the rest of the festival was divided by a street where cars were allowed to continue driving through. Hence, the intersection marked sonidero as marginal, outside the Fiesta del Sol similar to the Back of the Yards Festival.

This stage is not the topic of focus in this section. The fiesta del Sol festival had designated a stage strictly for sonidos. More sonidos were found performing throughout the festival aside from the sonidero stage. Most were hired by private companies to help promote their products. Verizon Wireless hired a Sonido to play cumbia to lure in potential cell phone clients. A second booth occupied by a local calling card vendor hired Sonido el Mero Bueno and other sonidos to perform at his booth. The sonidos brought their state of the art sound equipment with their rack mixers, amplifiers, and extensive collection of speakers. The calling card vendor also hired several young ladies to dance to the sonidos' performances. At some point, Sonido El Mero Bueno told me to dance with these young ladies. I was very reluctant at first, and almost told El Mero Bueno I refused to partake in the dancing. But I also worried about compromising my research

relationship with El Mero Bueno if I had said no to him. So I worked up the courage to dance with the young ladies.

These young ladies were hired to advertise the calling card company with their sex appeal. While these young women did not express feelings of sexual objectification, I felt I was aiding gender inequality the entire time I danced with them. However, it was redeeming to know that one of the young women was on her way to college and did not have to rely on such work for the rest of her life. I spent a few moments where I offered some tips how to be successful in college and congratulated her on continuing her education.

After I got away from dancing on stage, I noticed several members of various sonidero dance groups had surrounded the calling card stage and began to dance the music played by El Mero Bueno. One sonido, in particular, by the name of Sonido Sur America was accompanied by his usually large entourage that resembled a dance group. Sonido Sur America and his dance group formed a dance circle. A second club de baile (dance group) then followed suit by forming a separate dance circle. It became very clear the dance groups chose not to collaborate with each other that evening. Instead, they formed competing dance circles.

The two dance circles caught the attention of a performing sonido. This sonido was not thrilled to view such fragmentation. He offered the following critique over the microphone in-between songs, “recuerdan que la rueda es para divertir, no para combatir” (The dance circle is for everyone’s enjoyment not for competition). The performing sonido felt the dance circle was a communitarian space for dancers to display their elaborate dance moves. The sonido’s call for collaboration was ignored by the multiple

dance groups in the separate dance circles. Both dance circles carried on throughout the remainder of the night.

I never noticed tension between these particular dance groups. The second club de baile really enjoyed attending sonidero bailes where Sonido Sur America performed. The competition was inspired because both groups wanted to execute their best dance moves. The dance circles allowed for friendly competition that night. However, the sonidero viewed the competition as counterproductive. He viewed it as challenging the united community that sonidero presented to the entire festival. Under the original theory of cultural citizenship, the assertion of rights by the sonidero participants was accomplished that night. The two ruedas simply meant more participants. I view these two groups competing to outshine each other. This struggle for belonging directed me to the conclusion the two dance groups battled for superiority in their separate ruedas. In the case of the Fiesta del Sol, sonidero was fighting for an equal position within the larger diasporic cultural Mexican community of Chicago, while the dance groups danced for authority in the sonidero scene.

The Minneapolis Case and Cultural Citizenship

Due to migrant trails and other labor opportunities, Mexicans are not strangers to Minnesota having multiple migration patterns throughout the years. Historian Dennis Valdes informs that Mexican migration to the Twin Cities dates back prior to WWI²¹⁰ in neighborhoods like St. Paul's West Side. Throughout the years, Mexicans continued to arrive in the state of 10, 000 a year. The second half of the twentieth century has seen a decline in European immigration to Minnesota and more immigrants from developing

²¹⁰ Dionicio Nodín Valdés, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 25.

areas of the world arriving to the state. Refugees from Somalia and Southeast Asia join Mexicans in the groups that have established communities in Minnesota. However, according to a study conducted by the Minnesota State Demographic Center, it was not until 1995 that Mexicans became one of the larger immigrant groups in Minnesota.²¹¹ The study's analysis coincides with the huge emigration of Mexicans northward after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement. This particular study informs us that Mexicans have concentrated around areas with food processing plants,²¹² mostly meatpacking work. Another study conducted by the Hispanic Advocacy for Community Empowerment through Research (HACER) out of the Hubert Humphrey Institute explains, "Kmart in [South Minneapolis] was frequently mentioned as having specific concentrations [of Latino residents]."²¹³ This particular Kmart is located adjacent to a now defunct meat packing plant that employed Mexican immigrants. A little further down Lake St. is where many Mexican businesses thrived and formed a booming Latina/o commercial strip. Several sonidero dances along with more contemporary Mexican duranguense and corridos performances are held on Lake St. every weekend.

Interestingly, a sonidero dance on Lake St. demonstrated how cultural citizenship was disrupted on the dance floor, only to be reworked by a couple who was forced off for not paying their entrance fee. Most nightclubs often have a cover charge which patrons must pay before they enter the dance space. Contrary to the original Mexico City sonidero bailes where many of the dances were known to have taken place "al aire libre"

²¹¹ Barbara J. Ronningen, "Immigrants in Minnesota: An increasingly diverse Population," Population Notes Minnesota State Demographic Center, (2000):2.

²¹² Ibid, 4.

²¹³ Mary Martin, "Latino Realities: A Vibrant Community Emerges in South Minneapolis", (Minneapolis: HACER, 1998), 19.

(out in the open), sonidero dances in the US are different because promoters ensure everyone pays. Mexican migrants must pay the cover charge in order to partake in the leisure in the Minneapolis nightclubs. The following scenario facilitates a better understanding of this idea.

On a relatively warm April night, I arrived to the weekly sonidero bailes in Minneapolis to a microphone welcome by Sonido Fuerte, “ya llego el Rudy! Chicago, Illinois (with an emphasis on the s at the end of the Illinois)” But before that, the security asked for my ID even though he sees me regularly. Then, Sonido Fuerte’s wife says hello and tells me “son diez manito (the entry fee is 10 dollars).²¹⁴ Then I am searched by the security to ensure no illegal weapons or substance gets through the door. I had no problem entering the dance as I covered the entrance fee and was cleared for any illegal products. Unfortunately, a couple attending the dance did not have a similar experience.

The couple consisted of a medium height dark skinned Mexican man wearing neatly pressed khaki pants and a long sleeved flannel shirt and well combed hair. His wife was of equal height or slightly shorter, with a similar skin color wearing skin tight jeans and a sleeveless white blouse and like her husband, neatly combed straight hair hanging to her shoulders. The couple appeared to be neatly groomed. The couple had dinner there and, enjoyed a few drinks afterwards. They did not display any sort of immediate financial problems that would keep them from spending money at a nightclub. However, their night came to an abrupt end when they were literally removed from the dance floor.

²¹⁴ Fieldnote, April 25, 2008.

The couple arrived to the dance and avoided paying the entrance fee by telling the security guard and Sonido Fuerte's wife that they were there only to have dinner, not to dance. Later on, the couple went to the dance floor when they heard a pleasing tune. Right when the man was going to lead his wife by moving her by the hips into dancing a popular "cumbia sonidera," the security grabbed the husband by the arms to keep him from moving his body or his wife from responding to the music. The man quickly began to argue with the security guard. The wife attempted to diffuse the situation. The man even pointed towards Sonido Fuerte, who was observing from the elevated cabina (DJ booth), with the hopes that Sonido Fuerte would call off the security so the couple could dance. On the contrary, Sonido Fuerte asked him, "No que no mas iba a comer comradre?" (I thought you were only going to eat?). Sonido Fuerte relied on cover charges to make money. Sonido Fuerte, therefore, sided with the security guard. The contradiction in this scenario was expressed on the dance floor because only paid customers were allowed to partake in the dance. In other words, the couple was restricted in joining the other dancers in asserting their cultural rights. The process of cultural citizenship could not account for everyone at the dance.

The couple looked like they could have afforded the ten-dollar entrance fee. Their protest was based on principle insisting that they had already consumed food and that should have guaranteed their free entrance to the dance. However, the security, like any form of police force, is hired to protect the interest of private investment. It was the security guard in this scenario that changed my thinking of cultural citizenship as far more complicated than simply theorizing the right to be different and claim space. Once the couple realized they were not allowed to dance nor had the approval of the sonido,

they removed themselves from the dance floor to the bar area, which was divided by a new set of flooring that distinguished the two areas, where the argument continued and more individuals had to get involved to calm the situation. The security guard broke up the couple's dance moves during "La cumbia gabacha."²¹⁵ This song celebrates the extensive popularity sonidero is achieving in the United States and states that cumbia sonidera is danced all over the country. In doing so, the song acknowledges that Mexicans immigrants are living, establishing, and thriving in U.S. cities. "La cumbia gabacha" hints at cultural citizenship. The song's message of community formation, however, got disrupted the moment the couple was denied dancing in the space. Thus, the security's and the sonidero's actions to refuse this couple set up a moment that halted the cultural citizenship project sonidero and leisure spaces attempted to embody. This couple was excluded from the dance. They were also excluded from contributing to larger process of claiming space. The couple had to reposition themselves in a different area of the restaurant in order to create a separate community outside the emerging one that took place on the dance floor.

Later on that night, once the argument was diffused, the couple danced in the bar area, just to the side from the dance floor. The bar area was demarcated with a rubber snake cable that separated it from the dance floor. The bar area had a different floor tile pattern than the dance floor. These distinctions created physical and social borders. The dance floor was for dancing and socializing. The bar area was a transient location where workers sold alcohol and spectators stepped away from the dance floor. Men and women observed other dancers or socialized in the area. I have witnessed heterosexual couples

²¹⁵ Chapter 2 of this thesis discusses the correlation of "La cumbia gabacha" with community formation and transnationalism.

dance there. Their purpose for dancing in that area often is to have more room for couples to execute elaborate moves. On some occasions, people dance in this area. Same-sex couples have also danced in the bar area separate from the larger dance floor.

More importantly, the couple, described in the Minneapolis case, used the bar area to continue dancing without paying the entry fee. They were not bothered by the security and the husband did not argue with security like he had done earlier. This is not to claim there was harmony. This vignette forced me to rethink how scholars have theorized cultural citizenship. I concluded from my fieldwork that even community spaces are also spaces of contention and alienation. The couple-forced their way into the dance-but were forced back out-demonstrated that cultural citizenship is, as the words of the late Stuart Hall, “without guarantee.”²¹⁶ In this vignette, the actions of the *sonido* to remain indifferent and the security guard who made sure that only paid customers could dance in the nightclub proved real limitations to community formations in Minneapolis nightclubs. The nightclub workers only allowed paid customers to partake in the *sonidero* community. These occurrences do not jeopardize the cultural citizenship theory entirely. Based on my participant observations, I view the cultural citizenship theory to be messy or as I advance in the next section, more competitive.

Competing Cultural Citizenships

George Lipsitz states, “...what might seem ‘marginal’ to members of the dominant culture is the ‘center’ for someone else.”²¹⁷ Lipsitz’s words echo the important

²¹⁶ Stuart Hall, “The Problem with Ideology: Marxism Without Guarentees,” In *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. ed. Stuart Hall, David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

²¹⁷ George Lipsitz, “Con Safos: Can cultural studies read the writing on the wall?” In *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian (New York: Routledge, 2006), 48.

contribution of cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship theory was meant to center the lives of Latinos living in the margins of U.S. society. Scholars often viewed all forms of community politics under this theory as resisting U.S. hegemony. However, my vignettes displayed how sonidero community bailes contained shifting centers and margins. I merge Black feminist theorist Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality²¹⁸ and the theory of cultural citizenship to work through the margins enforced in community spaces like sonido bailes. I propose to view these moments as "competing cultural citizenships." I define "competing cultural citizenships" as the multiple and, often times, contested positions held in racial/ethnic communities that alter how these communities fight for inclusion and claim rights.

The vignettes of sonidero events discussed in this chapter highlight how margins take shape in community spaces. Racial, gender, sexual, immigrant, and class margins are reinforced in the Chicago and Minneapolis cases. The Chicago festivals compartmentalized Mexican popular music, where sonidero experienced a marginal presence. Sonidero experienced marginality on multiple levels. The macro marginality comes in the form that these festivals placed the sonidero stages in symbolically less prominent locations. Marginality was also materialized internally within the sonidero participants. While sonidero attempted to gain equal access to the festival, they reproduced gender hierarchies by employing female dancers to sell calling cards. The other internal qualms among the sonidero enthusiasts materialized in fragmented forms.

²¹⁸ Intersectionality advanced how scholars theorized identity politics. Crenshaw's main objective was to prove that violence against women of color highlighted how race, class, and gender overlapped and were not mutually exclusive. She emphasized how intergroup differences existed and ignoring them only resulted in negative consequences. For a detailed discussion on intersectionality, see Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1242.

The various dance groups chose to create separate *ruedas*. Using the intersectionality model (multiple oppressive structures overlapping), I began to question if a united cultural citizenship was possible? The fight for inclusion took place in different shapes. Sonidos wanted sonidero to be accepted by the larger Mexican community with equal footing enjoyed by more “traditional” music styles like *corridos* or *ballet folklórico*. The sonidos competed amongst themselves to outshine one another. The sonidero dance participants formed two *ruedas* rather than sharing one. The end results will not be neatly packaged. The Chicago festivals were meant to forge community in the respective Mexican neighborhoods. One can argue that unity was achieved in those festivals because immigrants and their children gathered in the name of immigrant Mexican culture. The actual outcome, however, led me to think differently. These festivals highlighted the tensions based on culture, gender, race, class, and immigrant histories. I believe viewing these cultural spaces as having competing cultural citizenships better carves out the power relations that influence peoples’ behavior and cultural norms.

The Minneapolis case also cannot be analyzed strictly through a lens of race or class but rather intersectionally as both. The Minneapolis case highlighted how Mexican patrons must have expendable income to consume expensive beverages and pay the entry fee in order to participate in the community dance. It is limiting to solely view the dance as a community space resisting the marginal position Latino workers find themselves in Minneapolis due to immigration status. I also center class and sexual preference as significant to analyzing the Minneapolis case in my discussion of cultural citizenship. An intersectional lens of the Minneapolis case can highlight how patrons resist multiple structures found in the *baile*. The bar area became the “center” for same-sex couple

dancing and for the couple who did not pay. “Their” center might have been viewed as the margins by the rest of the dancing participants. I, however, emphasized the bar area as center because it allowed for alienated subjects to form a competing cultural citizenship separate from separate from the larger Minneapolis sonidero community.

CONCLUSION

Mexicans who frequent the Chicago and Minneapolis sonidero scene are important to be discussed in Latino Studies and ethnography because it tells us a lot about how local diasporic Mexican communities articulate their subjectivity through these dance spaces. Sonidero is a cultural phenomenon which was brought with Mexicans in their migrations to the Midwest. Now, it can be used to claim space and rights in Chicago festivals and Minneapolis nightclubs to re-imagine what we know as competing cultural citizenships. According to Suzanne Oboler, “unlike white Americans, Latinos constantly have to prove their citizenship.”²¹⁹ The currents debates around citizenship and Latinos remains a heavily contested discourse. Former Presidential candidate Ron Paul has introduced a legislation to “amend the Constitution and end automatic birthright citizenship.”²²⁰ Now more than ever, we need to examine alternative avenues of citizenship. Then, we must scrutinize those alternative avenues to ensure no person or group is alienated in those spheres. Sonidero spaces can serve as the sites where cultural citizenship is reconstructed by Mexican and Latino immigrants in years to come.

²¹⁹ Suzanne Oboler. “It Must Be a Fake!” in *Race and Ethnicity in Society: The Changing Landscape*, ed Elizabeth Higginbotham & Margaret L. Andersen (Australia: Thomson Wadsworth Press 2006), 193.

²²⁰ Ron Paul, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/paul/paul346.html>.

Chapter 5

OrganizacionSonidera.com: Chicago Sonidos, Internet Consumption, and Latino Expressive Culture at Sonic Speeds

“we want to... ‘brownify’ virtual space...to exchange a different sort of information— mythical, poetical, political, performative, imagistic; and on top of that to find grassroots applications to new technologies...” -Guillermo Gómez-Peña²²¹

“Si, ok, bueno jóvenes, ya todo listo. Estamos calentando motores aquí en la pachanga sonidera” (Yes, ok, alright jóvenes, we have everything prepared to begin. We are gearing up here in the pachanga sonidera). The proclamation delivered by Minneapolis-based Sonido Fuerte de la salsa was heard over the radio airwaves and via the internet in early 2008. Sonido Fuerte follows up with “los teléfonos están para reventar” (the lines are blowing up) to reference that callers are phoning in to request music and *saludos*. The message board is receiving message after message from listeners tuned in on the web. The introduction begins with a sound bite, “Te quiero México.” The show is followed with cumbias, salsa, and bachata in addition to *saludos* and banter in sonidero fashion.

400 miles away in Chicago, Sonido El Mero Bueno virtually greeted an audience present on the sonidero internet program via the website *organizacionsonidera.com*. His counterpart, Sonido Chido yelled over the microphone, “para mi compachi” (compachi is his slang reference for compadre). The *saludo* is followed by a salsa romantica to commence the program after an electronically automated introduction with added sound effects of their stage names. Sonidos Chido and El Mero Bueno creatively altered the song with their DJ mixers. They interrupted the salsa romantica midsong to deliver a

²²¹ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “The Virtual Barrio @ the Other Frontier (or The Chicano Interneta)” in *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life*, ed. Alondra Nelson, Thuy Linh N. Tu, and Alicia Headlam Hines (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), 196.

saludo to gente de Ciudad Neza. The interludes between songs consist of the latest dance crazes such as “We Don’t Speak Americano” as background. This web program will continue for two hours, and is streamed once a week allowing listeners to send *saludos* on a message board or personally contact the sonidos through their cell phones.

The opening vignettes demonstrate how Mexican sonidos and enthusiasts in Minneapolis and Chicago are quickly capitalizing on the internet and mass communication technology, such as mobile phones, in order to perform for their followers via cyberspace. The sonidero internet programs themselves are creative ways to broaden your listener base beyond the physical dance floor. I argue in this chapter that sonidero internet programs like laorganizacionsonidera.com and [pachanga sonidera](http://pachangasonidera.com) allow Midwestern Mexicans to transgress time and space in order to produce and circulate Latina/o expressive culture at sonic speeds.

The majority of scholarship on sonidero privileges the Sonido (the person) and the physical dances. These topics have every right to be centered in scholarship as they are the material worlds that construct the social spaces at the nightclub or festival. However, the internet has created yet another avenue for events and ideas to circulate. The internet now gives humans the opportunity to consume popular music from their personal computers. The sonidero movement has capitalized on the internet. Sonidero enthusiasts can now enjoy the cultural scene without leaving their home. The previous chapter devoted attention to studying festivals and public places at large. Here, I will transition to a virtual ethnography where participation does not require physical proximity between the audience and the sonidos. While other major cities have sonidero web programs of their own, scholars have yet to discuss the virtual component of the respective cultural

style. Hence, the web programs produced out of Chicago and Minneapolis are case studies that interrogate the versatility of sonidero in the Midwest United States.

In addition to the festivals and dances, sonidos also rely on everyday technology to sustain intimate relationships with their followers beyond the night club. The relationship between the dance space and personal music technology is heavily interconnected. The end of the 20th Century also saw a new shift with the popular use of the internet. Internet programs, websites, and blogs fulfill this role in our new century as artists heavily rely on Myspace and Facebook to circulate their artwork. The two cases discussed here employ both radio and internet. Radio and internet are now woven together because radio stations give listeners the options to consume programming on the FM/AM dial and through online streaming. What is unique about the internet compared with the radio is a visual viewing component in addition to simply listening to performances. Second, participation has been altered by the internet. Radio stations have always allowed listeners to partake by calling in to a particular program to deliver *saludos* or win contests. The internet offers participants the message board where they could communicate with other audience members.

Sonidero, the digital divide, and the Internet Culture Wars

Internet usage amongst Latinos is clearly on the rise. However, many inequalities persist in the virtual world as they do in the material world. The digital divide has had material consequences for internet use among different communities. We have also witnessed internet social sites like Facebook and individual websites become vehicles as well as battlegrounds for cultural identity. Hence, the internet has become central to the

lives of Mexican immigrants as it allows for long distance nationalism²²² articulated in the sonidero scene.

Internet use varies from sending business emails between multinational corporate executives to chatting with friends on Facebook. African American and Latino communities have had unequal access to the internet compared to their white counterparts ever since it became accessible to households. Latinos, according to a study by the Pew Hispanic Research Center, statistically utilize the internet less at only 56% compared to 71% by Whites and 60% by African Americans.²²³ These percentages highlight the inequality of internet use and information circulation. What is more telling about this study, more than percentages of internet use, is how Latinos are connecting to the web. The Pew Hispanic Research demonstrates that the majority of online use done by Latinos is via their smart phones with internet technology and less through home or portable computers.²²⁴ Cell phones with internet technology are nearly a staple in our information age but these devices are limiting in their use. Laptops, on the other hand, allow users to engage in more business and political activities on the web, while smartphones only serve as entertainment and socializing tools. According to Andromeda Yelton,

“the fact that already vulnerable populations are disproportionately likely to experience a different kind of Internet [access with a smartphone]—one that’s great for social networking and photo sharing but that shuts people out of political and economic participation.”²²⁵

²²² Nina Glick Schiller & Georges Eugene Fournon, *Georges Woke up Laughing: Long-Distant Nationalism and the Search for Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 17-24.

²²³ Susannah Fox & Gretchen Livingston, “Latinos Online Hispanics with Lower Levels of Education and English Proficiency Remain Largely Disconnected from the Internet” *Pew Hispanic/Pew Internet*, March 14, 2007

²²⁴ Mark Hugo Lopez, Ana Gonzalez Barrera, & Eileen Patten, “Closing the Digital Divide: Latinos and Technology Adoption” *Pew Hispanic Center*, March 7, 2013.

²²⁵ Andromeda Yelton, “Who Are Smartphone Users?” *Library Technology Reports*, 48 (2012): 8.

The use of cell phone internet technology implies unequal relationships among various racial and ethnic groups and class backgrounds. The research concludes that if Americans want to maintain an economic edge in the global economy, then Latinos and Blacks must begin to experience the internet with more home-use and computer devices that have more functions than simply socializing on Facebook.²²⁶

In the case of the sonidero scene, the outcomes may vary regarding the internet. I have already noted how Facebook and social media sites benefit many sonidos and sonidero enthusiasts by expanding networks. We must view their consumption as both pleasurable and business-related. Yes, the business side is positive, but pleasure is also beneficial to sonidos and their fans. For example, one night during a dance, I caught one sonido playing a basketball video game on his IPHONE. Immediately, I thought he must be bored. On the contrary, he was enjoying himself. His actions also direct me to conclude that the internet use amongst sonidos can also be simply for enjoyment and not always directly linked to networking. A more concrete example that is related to the dance participants is documenting the event and immediately uploading their photos and/or videos to Facebook. When sonidos post videos or photos of dances, it is with the purpose of promoting themselves. The enthusiast could also have intentions of promoting the sonidero depending if they are friends with the sonido. Those dance participants who are not affiliated with the sonido will document the event and upload it to the internet for the sole reason of demonstrating how much fun they had. Hence, the internet as a space to archive the night's dance serves different purposes for the sonido and the audience.

²²⁶ Michael Boone, M. LaVelle Hendricks, and Rusty Waller, "Closing the Digital Divide and its Impact on Minorities" GLOBAL eLEARNING 3 (2014): 3.

There are business motives but also pleasurable ones where portable internet technology connects sonidero to the World Wide Web.

Another important finding by the Pew Hispanic Research Center regarding Latinos and internet use highlights that there is a higher percentage of U.S. born Latinos using the internet than 1st generation Latinos whom migrated to the U.S. This finding sheds light on the different uses of technology between 1st and 2nd or even 3rd generation Latinos. The assimilation literature would argue that this phenomenon is an epitome of 2nd generation youth incorporating themselves into American society and departing from their parent's immigrant culture. However, I view the internet as a virtual place where 1st and 2nd generation Latinos alike can proudly display their immigrant culture by proclaiming their cultural pride with pictures of flags or images of the homeland. Examples of cultural pride for Latin American sending countries exerted by both 1st and 2nd generation Latinos on the internet are phrases like "Mexican Pride" and pictures of Latin American cities and Mexican ranchos on across Facebook pages.

Despite the digital divide that places Latino migrants at a disadvantage, the internet is now assisting many Mexican immigrants to communicate with their families in their natal countries. Víctor M. González et al. theorized that the internet has become another mode of communication next to calling cards.²²⁷ The telephone calling card business has enjoyed lucrative business by immigrants worldwide relying on their services to call home. But the internet is beginning to compete with calling cards on a small scale, as migrants can now stream live conversations with family members and instant messenger chat. These scholars documented how migrants pay up to \$100-\$180

²²⁷ Víctor M. González, Luis A. Castro, and Marcela D. Rodríguez, "Technology and Connections: Mexican Immigrants in the U.S." *IEEE TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY MAGAZINE* Summer 2009.

American dollars for one-hour videoconferences with relatives.²²⁸ These prices for videoconferencing seem out of reach for Latino families in the U.S. who earn minimum wage. Websites like SKYPE have yet to earn more Latino consumers even though live video chat is free between SKYPE USERS and calls to a landline in Mexico is cheaper than calling cards with this service.²²⁹ The majority of immigrants, even with internet technology accessible, still heavily rely on calling cards to speak with their families.²³⁰ The internet has certainly offered new modes of communication for Latinos to stay in touch, and more importantly, involved in the daily lives of their families thousands of miles away. However, the calling card remains the preferred mode of dialing home because internet service in Latin America is extremely expensive. Therefore, if internet in Latin America is not a common household item, Latinos in the U.S. will continue to rely on calling cards.

The Pew Hispanic Research findings may demonstrate that more U.S. born children use the internet, but these youth may also assist their 1st generation parents and friends with going online. Perhaps, the \$100-\$180 dollars that Víctor M. González and his colleagues²³¹ discussed in their essay may not be the only source of access as free services such as SKYPE are now accessible to hold a virtual meeting with family members. Other free services such as Facebook chat and MSN messenger also exist that allows communication beyond the U.S-Mexico border. Savvy 1st and 2nd generation

²²⁸ Ibid, 45.

²²⁹ SKYPE is one service that provides inexpensive video chat and phone calls. Research shows that using SKYPE and similar providers will alleviate some of the financial burden of communicating with friends and family across the globe. See Matthew D. Matsaganis, "The Social Impact of Voice-over-Internet-Protocol Technology on Latinos" *The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute*, 2009, 7.

²³⁰ Steven Vertovec, "Cheap Calls: The Social Glue of Migrant Transnationalism" *Global Networks* 4 (2004): 219-224.

²³¹ Ibid.

Latino youth can direct their elders to use free service communication sites like Facebook or MSN messenger to avoid paying high premiums for video conferencing. Hence, internet usages allows for mixed generation and mix status Latino families to engage with mass communication technology to keep in touch with family in the homeland.

The transnational capabilities offered by the Internet are very fascinating. However, it mirrors the telephone calling card business where you must pay the fee to use these services. The expensive fees to have a videoconference have already been discussed but paying for home internet access can be an additional cost for immigrant families. Immigrants and their families living in the U.S. are not the only individuals who must pay for internet access in order to communicate. The families and friends who reside in the natal countries must pay as well if they wish to have contact with their transmigrant loved ones. This point can be elucidated by the fact that the majority of people in Latin America do not have home internet access in their homes. However, the people in these nations desire to participate in virtual communities nonetheless. Many find themselves frequenting internet cafes or “cybers.” These internet cafes are not exactly cafes where food and refreshments are sold. They are simply businesses where people go to use the internet for a fee. If migrants wish to communicate with their loved ones, time and days must be arranged ahead of time for both parties to be online. Both parties must pay for internet in order for the communication to be a reality.

Regardless of internet costs, these virtual encounters between family members are often times very emotional. The transgression of time and space does not fully compensate for long distance separations. Thus, the internet, like long distance calling, becomes critical in immigrants’ lives and the loved ones left in their natal countries. The

emotions exerted by migrants and their families derives from the fact that you can physically view each other but cannot be within physical proximity of one another, as is the case in face to face encounters. In many occasions where immigrants are first introduced to internet technology, the virtual meetings maybe the first time where they have seen their loved ones in a very long time period.

In order to complicate matters, we must take note that the digital divide is not the only inequality confronting Mexican immigrant in cyberspace. The production and circulation of transnational Mexican expressive cultures intensifies the contemporary cultural wars in the U.S. where immigrants are penalized for not assimilating and “illegally” entering the country. Right wing pundits like Patrick Buchanan and the late Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington argue that this process is dangerous to American identity and U.S. exceptionalism. These scholars based their argument on anxiety over language, culture, and population growth of Latinos in major U.S cities. The battle has now been taken to the internet. Latinos use the internet to further advance their culture and combat racism. Rather than simply understanding sonidero and other Mexican expressive cultural style as simply flourishing in the U.S., we must view them as a response to constant anti-immigrant rhetoric and laws enacted throughout the country. As people marched in 2006 and continue to do so for immigrant rights’ like the DREAM ACT, the U.S. born youth along with recently arrived immigrants have altered the way in which they imagine themselves in U.S. society.

Thinking through (Virtual) Transnationalism

Sonidero participants and the Mexican immigrants who follow the sonidero cultural style on any given day use Facebook and Myspace and internet programs to

circulate their music while they proclaim their love for Mexico. Their web pages are covered with the colors and symbols of the Mexico and U.S.A. flag accompanied with images of enormous sound systems to demonstrate their transnational loyalties for both countries. Many sonidos will refer to the U.S.A. as “la union americana”²³² across their social media pages. These claims on the internet are observed by countless viewers throughout the United States and Mexico. Migrants who reside in the U.S. often relay messages on sonidero websites and Facebook pages to their relatives and friends in Mexico. These internet encounters, thus, formulate a unique transnational experience that is virtual in nature. It alters the way scholars have viewed traditional transnational imaginings of popular music which have only focused on the physical dance floor and the lyrics of songs. I propose a “virtual transnationalism” to study sonidero and other cultural styles that now consume the internet to transcend territorial boundaries. I define virtual transnationalism encompassing a communicative transnational practice via the internet that extends beyond national borders for consumption by migrants and their non-immigrant families. As evidenced throughout the chapter, Mexican immigrants rely on a virtual transnationalism when exerting their love for sonidero and Mexico.

The complex musical identity created by sonidero speaks to its transnational qualities as it seeks out music genres that migrated to Mexico from Colombia and the Caribbean. More importantly, the transnational qualities of sonidero are highlighted when Mexican migrants re-create sonidero in the U.S. This cultural style is closely linked to the transnational labor circuit that drives Mexican migrants to the United States in search of work. It highlights like many popular culture forms that migrants are more than simply

²³² La union America is a reference to the United States of America. I have heard this phrase multiple times by Mexican sonideros.

economic actors in the host country. Their initiative to hold these dances allows migrants to maintain a web of social relations amongst the migrants living in the U.S. and Mexico defined by transnationalism. This chapter expands on the transnational experiences of sonidero by shifting focus on a more lived—or this case—a virtual transnationalism mediated by internet consumption. By simply using the Internet, this musical style has also expanded its transnational qualities and consumption. The virtual content circulated on the internet becomes central to participating in sonidero.

From the AM dial to cyberspace

In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to demonstrate how The Pachanga sonidera and the Chicago-based web program hosted on organizacionsonidera.com fill an important gap in transnational literature as well as Latino music and dance studies. Most transnational studies on Mexican immigrants focus on material and symbolic relations held by migrants. Studies of Latino popular culture show how Latinos recreate their musical styles in nightclubs, radio station, and CD consumption. Yet, web programs broaden our understanding of transnationalism by allowing individuals to maintain ties to their home countries via a personal computer.

The nightclub is foundational to the institution of sonidero as a cultural movement. Building on this movement, technology like radio and importantly now, the internet transgresses how sonidero is produced, circulated, and consumed. Dolores Inés Casillas states, “Spanish-language radio stations send saludos over great distances in real time.”²³³ As stated throughout my thesis, sonidero heavily relies on the saludo. The use of

²³³ Dolores Inés Casillas, “‘¡Puuurroooo MÉXICO!’ Listening to Transnationalism on U.S. Spanish-Language Radio” in *Beyond El Barrio: Everyday Life in Latina/o America*, ed. Gina M. Pérez, Frank Guridy, and Adrian Burgos, Jr. (New York: New York University, 2010), 53.

the internet has created opportunities for Mexican migrants to consume sonidero differently. For example, the saludos relayed on the internet exceed the distance afforded by local radio stations. It has also altered how many migrants communicate and socialize with each other and their loved ones in Mexico. Both sonidero programs allows for fans to participate in these new ways of communications and music consumption. La Pachanga Sonidera still airs their program on the radio but have put the Internet to good use. La Pachanga Sonidera's host, Sonido Fuerte has fused radio and Internet to give his audience a complex entertainment experience. The following section demonstrates how Sonido Fuerte implemented Internet socializing into his radio program.

La Pachanga Sonidera and the Twin Cities

The pachanga sonidera which is based in Minneapolis began simply as a radio program on a local AM dial station in 2008. The listeners called in to request their favorite sonidero cumbia and salsa staple songs. La Pachanga Sonidera does not simply play music for its audience. A huge portion of the show is also devoted to interactions with the listeners. The host sonido also allow his fans to call in to give *saludos*. There is also a lot of *vacililando* or banter and jokes. The show's beginning years restricted its listener base to mostly the radio air waves on the AM dial. On many occasions, laborers would call the show from their cell phones while working at local restaurants to dedicate songs to their loves or their Mexican home state. The majority of listeners would call in with hopes of winning one of the many prizes on the show like restaurant coupons or complimentary entrance to dances. Sonido Fuerte would also invite famous sonideros to call in the program for interviews. One famous sonido, "La Changa" phoned in to la

Pachanga Sonidera via cell phone from LAX, the major Los Angeles airport in route to Minnesota for a performance.

Obviously, the AM dial was crucial to La Pachanga Sonidera becoming a popular radio program. The radio station stills depends on its listeners to hear in through a radio. However, the internet has allowed the show to reinvent itself and tap into modern methods of communication. In the beginning, the radio station which sponsored the show offered a link to stream the La Pachanga Sonidera on their webpage. However, the internet aspect was not heavily encouraged by the radio host. The radio program became so popular after two years that the host created a web page for the show. Then, he added a message board, where you no longer needed to physically be in twin cities area to hear the program on the AM dial as it was now possible to do so online. Now people in Minnesota, throughout the U.S. and Mexico can tune in to consume the Pachanga sonidera. More recently, audience members send their saludos via Facebook. Facebook chat notifications are constantly heard on the program. The saludo is then delivered over the airwaves.

Sonido Fuerte also creatively used the internet to insert small histories of sonidero in Mexico City and an autobiography of himself. During a conversation, Locquillo instructed me, “compadre, métase a la página de internet para que lea la historia de sonidero.”²³⁴ La Pachanga Sonidera had reached a point in their existence where they now circulated their version sonidero’s history rather than relying on official narratives written by newspaper articles or academic scholars. The internet became the space to continue this cultural movement but also a location to archive it.

²³⁴ Personal conversation with Sonido Fuerte.

The show's move to cyberspace was a sign of progress to the host. Locquillo like other sonidos are constantly looking for the next best thing in terms of music and technology. One day, Sonido Fuerte announced at a baile, "que todo estaba 100% computarizado," meaning that his performance relied solely on the use of his laptop rather than using CDs. His transition to a computer also implied he no longer had to use his massive-sized DJ rack mixer. He would simply connect his laptop to the house sound system. He also mentioned in conversation that he was pleased sonidos had phased out vinyl records because they were heavy to carry. These multiple transitions, according to Sonido Fuerte, were significant because sonidos no longer had to transport heavy equipment. The reliance on laptops rather than on CDs or vinyl records meant new modes of purchasing music would substitute the older ones. For example, sonidos may buy USB drives or data discs filled with hundreds of songs in MP3 format. The songs are then uploaded to laptop computers. The sonidos like Sonido Fuerte who perform solely on a laptop will carry less equipment with this new mode of music collecting. It also symbolized, more importantly, the technological advances in DJ and sound equipment which were afforded to Mexican sonidos. The internet, thus, is viewed by sonidos as another technological advancement next to digitalizing their performances and departure from older modes of performing. We will see in the next section how Chicagoland sonidos also advance their sonidero performances with the use of the Internet.

La organizacionsonidera.com and Chicagoland Sonidos

Chicago's sonidero web program is slightly different from the Minneapolis one. The Chicago one is streamed on *organizacionsonidera.com* which is dedicated strictly for sonidero related shows and topics. The website's owner is based in California but allows

for sonidos from all over the U.S. and Mexico to perform. The site is currently advertising the induction of a new sonido program based in Salt Lake City, Utah. Organizacionsonidera.com has become a site for sonidos and their fan base to formulate a community that spans national borders online. It is a live stream where fans actually view the sonidos in action, whereas the Minneapolis show does not allow the audience to view their actions. The Chicago show is similar to the Minneapolis program in that it relies on the viewers to type their *saludo* or on the message board. Viewers will often communicate with each other via the message boards and not solely with the sonido.

The *saludos* delivered by the sonido transcend Chicago to someone in Mexico or loved ones elsewhere in the United States. It is no surprise that the web programs with these qualities have altered the way in which music is now consumed. These actions renegotiate how audience members interact with the sonido. It alters what Robert Farris Thompson understood as *call and response* where the singer or performer interacts with participants to create a sense of social and aesthetic cohesiveness.²³⁵ This cohesiveness is now heavily dependent on the relationship mediated through the internet that moves beyond the dance floor. El Mero Bueno remarked that a saludo at a dance “es más intense...porque se vive, se siente”.²³⁶ The difference between a *saludo* at the physical dance compared to one via the internet program is concerned with reception.

The physical dance allows sonidos to view how the dance participants react to the delivered *saludo*. In many cases, a sonido may receive a wave from the appreciated dancer for the *saludo*. In other instances, the sonido may view participant’s bodily

²³⁵ Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 28.

²³⁶ Interview with Sonido El Mero Bueno

responses to the banter inserted into the *saludo*. Contrastingly, internet programs alter these interactions by relying on the message boards for the response rather than witnessing the bodily reactions afforded at the dances. The response on the internet comes in the form of a written message. The message boards become the mediators of the call and response process. Both the *sonido* and his fans rely on the message boards to interpret each others' participation with hopes that messages do not get lost in translation. When El Mero Bueno said that a *saludo* at the dance “se vive, siente,” he was accurate in stating that bodies are dependent on each other to maintain human interaction. It may seem as though El Mero Bueno's comments depart from my thesis. On the contrary, his ambivalence of the internet present the fascination and reservation people have of the internet. The internet allows El Mero Bueno to broaden his contacts and networks but still prefers face to face human contact. It is evident, however, that the call and response relationship between *sonidos* and fans is clearly renegotiated with the use of internet.

El Mero Bueno, however, does not hesitate to express how the internet program has been beneficiary to his cause. He states that the internet, “es la nueva era, la nueva era. Hay que revolucionar” [it is the new era and we must revolutionize with the times] and “Abre nuevas puertas, nuevos mercados” [it, the internet, opens new doors, new markets].²³⁷ Similar to la Pachanga *sonidera*, the transition to internet programming for El Mero Bueno and Chicagoland *sonidos* welcomes these virtual worlds. It is fitting to their identities as *sonidos* to seek out the latest technology to move their music performances to the internet. Regardless of El Mero Bueno's reservation on the reduction of human contact due to internet programming, he happily participated in the cyberspace

²³⁷ Interview with Sonido El Mero Bueno

performance, because he refuses not to be part of the vanguard in Chicago's sonidero scene.

"La nueva era" is exactly what is enticing about the internet. It is a new era. Despite its relatively short history, the internet is a very complex virtual world that produces complex social relationships among humans. More importantly, Sonido El Mero Bueno discusses how Facebook and the internet at large open up new markets when he states that it [the internet], "abre nuevas puertas" (open new doors). El Mero Bueno's use of "abre nuevas puertas" is informed by a cliché said in Spanish that is similar to the phrase "window of opportunities." The idea that the internet "abre nuevas puertas," implies there are many positive monetary and social outcomes arising from sonidos using the World Wide Web. Those *nuevas puertas* could include meeting other sonidos or being hired for a paid performance. Hence, the more people you know online, the more opportunities could that arise for sonidero gigs and to make money. Sonidos are constantly looking for new venues to perform in order to possibly make larger amounts of money. The internet connects the sonidos to other sonidos in neighboring towns and cities that will hire them for a night.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the significance of the Chicago and Minneapolis sonidero web programs offers us some insight in how migrants' lives are adapting to the internet age. While the internet is more readily accessible, lasting effects of the digital divide still persist in Mexican communities across the U.S. Mexican immigrants, regardless of the digital divide, seek out the internet to stay in touch with their families in the homeland; when many times, undocumented legal statuses keep families from physically seeing

each other. The sonidero web programs give migrants a little bit of hope by letting them transgress borders to reach out to their families through *saludos* and message board communication. It also creates what I defined as a virtual transnationalism that is politicized because now Mexican migrants and the sonidos occupy cyberspace. Virtual transnationalism is the process where a communicative transnationalism connects migrants in multiple countries and U.S. cities. Migrants have engaged in technological transnationalism prior to the internet with landline telephone service and phone cards. The internet, however, has completely altered how migrants communicate using technology. Phone companies offer international text message and affordable data plans. These services give people opportunities to live more intense relationship with constant social interactions. Mexican immigrants utilize Facebook and other internet technologies to circulate photos, chisme (gossip), family news, and even monies. With these contemporary forms of virtual transnationalism, Chicagoland and Minneapolis sonidos performing on cyberspace clearly seek out quotidian ways to use the internet. In doing so, they transgress the borders migrants confront in their daily lives.

EPILOGUE

When Did We Vote to Become Mexico?: Chicago Sonidos, and the Struggle for American Culture

On May 23, 2013, Conservative political commentator Ann Coulter posed the following question: When Did We Vote to Become Mexico? She answered herself by claiming the “Gang of Eight”²³⁸ is in the process of creating the greatest scandal in America with greater consequences than military failures in the Mideast. Coulter elaborates how the proposed immigration reform presented by the Senate’s “Gang of Eight” would eventually transform the United States into Mexico.²³⁹ The long-term consequences of the proposed immigration reform, according to Coulter, would be more votes for the Democratic Party and a major defeat for White America. Coulter’s prescription echoes earlier claims, made by Samuel Huntington—and most recently—Jason Richwine, who urged that the U.S. only welcome immigrants who do not pose a cultural threat to America’s Anglo-Saxon identity.

America is not alone in voicing their discontent towards immigrants. For example, Spain has taken extreme measures to curtail undocumented immigrants from its former Moroccan colony due to its current financial crisis. The Dominican Republic denies citizenship to Dominican-born individuals whose parents were illegal immigrants [especially Haitian immigrants].²⁴⁰ It appears that the people and nations of the world continue to hold reservation and anxieties over the migration of vulnerable labor subjects

²³⁸ The Senate Gang of 8 include the following Senators: Michael Bennet, D-CO, Richard J. Durbin, D-IL, Jeff Flake, R-AZ, Lindsey Graham, R-SC, John McCain, R-AZ, Bob Menendez, D-NJ, Marco Rubio, R-FL, Chuck Schumer, D-NY. This group of Bi-Partisan Senators have been appointed to craft Congress’s initial immigration bil on behalf of the U.S. Senate.

²³⁹ Ann Coulter, “When Did We Vote to Become Mexico?,” Ann Coulter’s Blog, May 23, 2013, <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/ann-coulter/2013/05/23/ann-coulter-column-when-did-we-vote-become-mexico>.

²⁴⁰ Ezra Fieser, “Dominican Republic denies birthright citizenship to children of illegal immigrants” *Global Post* May 9, 2011. <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/110429/stateless-dominican-republic-haiti>, accessed June 11, 2013.

to their shores. Coulter's vision of Mexican immigrants taking over the United States has occupied much attention in American media, and consequently, has influenced popular opinion.²⁴¹

However, one leading journalist in particular offers an oppositional reading of America's Latino immigrants. Juan Gonzalez contradicts Coulter's understanding of Latino migration to the United States. Both journalists construct different American Studies projects. Coulter argues Latino's children will join the underclass. Juan Gonzalez's American Studies, on the other hand, views this country's immigration population as a direct result of American economic domination of the globe.

I intended to produce an American Studies project in this dissertation inspired by Juan Gonzalez and as a challenge to Ann Coulter. My American Studies project understands the critical role of race and empire when formulating critiques of the assimilation schools while revisiting the transnational turn. My American Studies project depicts how Mexican immigrants positively transformed the United States and Mexico with everyday culture like sonidero. "Tambien Bailamos en el Norte" maps out contemporary forms of transnational lives created by Mexican immigrants who reside in the U.S. Rather than simply claiming that Mexican immigrants and their children have altered the cultural landscape of the United States, I believe they also have altered Mexican identity and cultural practices.

Sonidero enthusiasts and the sonidos themselves show us a different Mexico that borrows Latin American soundscapes coupled with Mexican nationalism. The cultural

²⁴¹ For a fruitful discussion on nativist media representations of Mexican immigration, see Leo R. Chavez, *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

milieu found in sonidero insists that Mexico holds a very unique heterogeneous musical past that is materialized in the U.S. While countries attempt to formulate a distinct national culture at the expense of disciplining creativity, people and groups often transgress cultural border to expand the way we conceptualize a nation's culture. The competing narratives that challenge the "official culture" of a country can also gain momentum outside national borders. In the case of Mexico, sonidero has held major popularity in Mexico City and its surrounding regions. However, Mexican immigrants in the United States have aided sonidero to earn equal footing in Mexican cultural circles similar to more popular Mexican musical styles like corridos with large followings in major U.S. cities and towns. Touring Sonidos travel from Mexico or within the United States to perform to sold-out crowds filled with mostly Mexican immigrants eager to dance the latest cumbias and salsa songs out of Colombia and the Caribbean. With the help of new communicative technology and social networks, sonidero has now reshaped how we imagine Mexican cultural norms that compete with vaquero culture and Latin American aesthetics.

Like the participants in this study, I understand that dancing is not a stagnant exercise. It requires movement. These movements span across the dance floor, across borders, and, also, across intellectual circles. These movements entail creativity and change. Thus, this thesis documents the change in our increasing transnational world that mediates the lives of many Mexican immigrants. While U.S. politicians have called for cultural purity and a reduction to migration from Latin America and other third world regions, dancing signifies how Latino immigration will not decrease. Mexican migrants will continue to arrive to the U.S. in response to global labor demands and American

domination of Mexico's economy. In other words, Mexican have and will continue to migrate into this nation because they [Mexicans and Latinos to a larger extend] are part of, what Juan Gonzalez phrased, "the unintended harvest of the U.S. Empire".²⁴²

²⁴² Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*: Revised Edition, (London: Penguin Books, 2011), xvi.



Figure 1-Sonido El Mero Bueno equalizes the sound on his DJ rack mixer while simultaneously delivering saludos at a baile.



Figure 2-Photo of Sonido El Mero Bueno's extensive sound system. His extensive collection of amplifiers and speakers are accompanied with large steel truss structures viewed in the background. The additional individuals in the photo are El Mero Bueno's chavos who are seen helping him out.



Figure 3-Sonido Ambiente Nueva (left) and Sonido El Mero Bueno (right) pose for a photo in the cabina (DJ booth). The two sonidos are close colleagues and friends.

Discography

Alberto Pedraza con su Ritmo y Sabor, *Oro Puro: 20 Exitos*. Titanio Records DGSO 60804. 2007.

Grupo La Suerte Sonidera *El Inicio de mi Historia* Internet release, CD 53.

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